



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY – 27 OCT 2021



	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	10/28 New Zealand won't welcome tourists yet 10/28 Cost of vaccine reluctance eastern Europe 10/28 Moscow nonworking period: cases, deaths 10/28 Germany Covid cases biggest leap in weeks 10/27 Indonesia warily weighs holiday travel 10/27 Ukraine town mass vaccination success 10/27 China is world's last 'zero Covid' holdout 10/27 Moroccans protest mass vaccination rules 10/27 UN: unequal vaccine access; economic gap 10/27 Taiwan confirms US military presence 10/27 India test fires nuclear-capable missile 10/27 India slams China's new boundary law 10/27 Negotiator: Iran will rejoin nuclear talks 10/27 Pakistan: violent anti-France Islamist rally 10/27 China: Taiwan no right join United Nations 10/27 Probe: Myanmar military systematic torture 10/27 Moldova turns to Poland; tensions w/Russia 10/27 Global food prices set to soar 10/27 Australia fighting fire with fire 10/27 Climate 'chain reactions' feared 10/27 China bold climate goals collide w/reality 10/27 Growing migrant caravan southern Mexico 10/26 WHO advisers warn pandemic far from over	10/28 Experts: new data shows value of vaccines 10/28 Economic growth rate sharply slows 10/27 FDNY union: ignore mandate 10/27 California virus cases stop falling 10/27 Meat industry: 59,000 cases, 269 deaths 10/27 Trick-or-treating okay during pandemic? 10/27 NYC braces: municipal vaccine mandate 10/27 Judge denies NYPD union to halt mandate 10/27 Cheap drug lowers Covid hospitalizations 10/27 CDC adds mood disorders Covid risk factor 10/27 Alabama gov. pushes back federal mandate 10/27 Limits: authority public health emergencies 10/27 Childcare crisis hampers economy 10/27 FEMA racial disparities in disaster aid 10/27 Higher food prices hit poor, food banks 10/27 HHS: more harm reduction for drug users 10/27 RI transfers land back Narragansett Tribe 10/27 Protected areas immigration enforcement 10/27 AG stands: memo on threats to educators 10/27 Water crisis: impact failing infrastructures 10/27 Green jet fuels ready for takeoff? 10/27 NY denies gas power plants upgrades 10/27 Nor'easter brings hurricane-force winds 10/27 Historic rain, snow refreshes California 10/27 State Dept. eases diplomatic restrictions 10/27 Air Force: details China info war revealed 10/27 JCS: close 'Sputnik moment' China missile 10/27 Fed signals concern on higher inflation risk 10/27 Stores: customers behind holiday shopping 10/27 US issues X gender designation passport 10/27 Potential safety problems Boeing 767, 757 10/27 Recall: second onion recall 10/26 Study: 'March Madness' parties Covid link 10/26 DOD: climate change impacts nat'l security 10/26 Run out storm names for hurricane season?	10/27 DOH: 719,500 cases, 8554 deaths 10/27 Skagit Co. faces rising Covid cases 10/27 Officials worry: possible 6th Covid wave 10/27 Health leaders: not enough getting vaccines 10/27 BLM demands Pierce Co. sheriff resign 10/27 North Cascades Highway closes Nov 15th 10/27 Jury: minimum wage immigrant detainees
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	10/28 'Simple but remarkable' malware loader 10/28 German students' data exposed; API flaw 10/27 Android spyware apps target Israel 10/27 Hackers steal \$130M Cream Finance 10/27 Free decryptor for Babuk ransomware 10/27 Hackers leak Israel defense ministry data 10/27 Free decryptor AtomSilo, LockFile victims 10/27 Suspected Russia disinformation campaign 10/27 Automotive parts manufacturer cyberattack	10/28 Small businesses pay to recover in breach 10/27 Attacks ramp up on web APIs 10/27 Uptick password spraying attacks 10/27 Adobe's surprise security bulletin 10/27 Cybercriminals claim hack of NRA 10/27 Industries most hit by ransomware 10/27 Healthcare faces Covid-induced triple threat 10/26 Schreiber Foods victimized in cyberattack 10/26 More Facebook-fueled violence inevitable?	10/27 FBI: ransomware on the rise 10/27 Mill Creek: social media threats to school
Terror Conditions Go to articles	10/28 UAE sends 12 ex-Gitmo detainees to Yemen 10/28 Germany: 5 youths plan IS-inspired attack 10/27 UK convicts man for terror plot 10/27 Dutch court convicts Iranian refugee 10/27 Taliban allow girls in schools w/caveats 10/27 Watchdog: violence to Afghan journalists 10/27 Manchester Arena inquiry: intel not shared	10/28 Taliban founder's son emerges in Kabul 10/27 Florida man pleads guilty: terror support	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	10/28 World fails to change avoid climate crisis 10/27 Rare, deadly cyclone floods Italy 10/27 Turkey's 2nd largest lake dries up 10/27 Climate change amplifies global violence?	10/27 What did sub hit in South China Sea? 10/27 Affidavit: movie set gun not checked 10/27 Study: harmful plastics in fast-food items 10/27 Cigarette sales rise; first time two decades	10/27 JBLM: 3 accidentally receive Covid shots 10/27 Coast Guard: 106 containers still floating
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	10/27 Crisis: gangs rule much of Haiti 10/27 Japan stays tough on cannabis	10/27 Officers charged: shooting man 60 times 10/27 L.A. school safety officer charged w/murder 10/27 NY trooper charged w/murder: car ramming 10/27 Enraged passenger attacks flight attendant 10/27 To fight murder rate rise cities pay shooters	10/27 Man shot, killed Seattle Central District 10/27 WSP investigates shooting near Capitol 10/27 US Marshal fugitive task force in shooting 10/27 Tacoma police plan to reduce violent crime

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	10/28 Economic growth rate sharply slows
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/28/us-gross-domestic-product-increases-at-2point0percent-annualized-pace-in-q3-vs-2point8percent-estimate.html
GIST	<p>The U.S. economy grew at a 2% rate in the third quarter, its slowest gain of the pandemic-era recovery, as supply chain issues and a marked slowdown in consumer spending stunted the expansion, the Commerce Department reported Thursday.</p> <p>Gross domestic product, a sum of all the goods and services produced, grew at a 2.0% annualized pace in the third quarter, according to the department's first estimate released Thursday. Economists surveyed by Dow Jones had been looking for a 2.8% reading.</p> <p>That marked the slowest GDP gain since the 31.2% plunge in the second quarter of 2020, which encompassed the period during which Covid-19 morphed into a global pandemic that resulted in a severe economic shutdown that sent tens of millions to the unemployment lines and put a chokehold on activity across the country.</p> <p>Declines in residential fixed investment and federal government spending helped hold back gains, as did a surge in the U.S. trade deficit, which widened to a near-record \$73.3 billion in August.</p> <p>Consumer spending, which makes up 69% of the \$23.2 trillion U.S. economy, increased at just a 1.6% pace for the most recent period, after rising 12% in the second quarter.</p> <p>Spending for goods tumbled 9.2%, spurred by a 26.2% plunge in expenditures on longer-last goods like appliances, while services spending increased 7.9%, a pullback from the 11.5% pace in Q2.</p> <p>Federal government spending fell by 4.7%, which the Commerce Department said was due to a halt in services and processing for the Paycheck Protection Program, a pandemic-era initiative aimed at providing bridge funding to businesses impacted by the shutdown.</p> <p>In a separate economic report, jobless claims totaled 281,000 for the week ended Oct. 23, another pandemic-era low and better than the 289,000 estimate. The total marked a decrease from the previous week's 291,000.</p> <p>Stock market futures remained higher after the report while government bond yields also climbed.</p> <p>The July-to-September period saw a major clogging of the nation's supply chain, which in turn dampened a recovery that began in April 2020 following the shortest but steepest recession in U.S. history.</p> <p>Shortages in labor and soaring demand for goods over services contributed to the bottleneck, which is not expected to ease until after the holiday season.</p> <p>Despite the Q3 weakness, economists largely expect the U.S. to bounce back in the fourth quarter and continue growth into 2022.</p> <p>Another significant factor for the Q3 number was the summertime rise of the Covid delta variant, a situation that has reversed itself in much of the country. Consumer activity, particularly in the vital services part of the economy, appears to have picked up and could fuel a late-year growth burst.</p> <p>"As Delta cases continue to subside, there may be more growth in the fourth-quarter as consumers will be more willing to spend on services involving in-person interactions," said Dawit Kebede, senior economist</p>

at the Credit Union National Association. “The supply chain challenges, however, will likely continue until next year making it difficult to satisfy increased consumer demand.”

Companies during the current earnings season have noted the issues with supply chains, but many say customers are willing to pay higher prices. That in turn has helped fuel inflation, which is running close to its 30-year high and also is expected by most economists and Federal Reserve policymakers to cool next year.

Thursday’s data indicated that at least the pace of the inflation rise had taken a step back.

Core personal consumption expenditures, which exclude food and energy and are the preferred gauge by which the Fed measures inflation, rose 4.5%, a deceleration from the second quarter’s 6.1% increase but still well above the pre-Covid pace. The headline PCE price index increased 5.3% in Q3, down from 6.5% in the previous period.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Recall: second onion recall
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/nation-world/onion-salmonella-outbreak-recall-keeler-family-farms/507-106bee67-0e9c-4879-9fb2-3c7dec0a8513
GIST	<p>Onions supplied by a second U.S. company have been recalled following a nationwide salmonella outbreak that has sickened more than 650 people in 37 states. Onions can last up to three months if properly stored, so there's concern potentially contaminated products may still be out there.</p> <p>Red, yellow and white onions from Keeler Family Farms of Deming, N.M., were sold to restaurants, food service locations, wholesalers and retailers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the Food and Drug Administration said. The recall, issued last Friday, came two days after a similar recall of the same onions from ProSource Produce LLC of Hailey, Idaho.</p> <p>The onions from Keeler Family Farms shipped between July 1 and August 25, 2021. They were imported from Chihuahua, Mexico, just as the ProSource onions were.</p> <p>The onions were distributed in 25-pound and 50-pound mesh bags with a label marked as MVP (product of MX).</p> <p>Anyone who knows their onions came from one of these companies or who do not know the source of their onions are urged to not sell or serve them and to throw them out.</p> <p>Recalls have also been issued by Potandon Produce LLC, HelloFresh and EveryPlate for onions or products that contained onions.</p> <p>There have been 652 reports of people getting sick in 37 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A reported 129 have ended up in the hospital. There have been no deaths. But the CDC said the number of people sickened could be higher if people recovered quickly without needing medical attention.</p> <p>Most people infected with Salmonella experience diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps, according to the CDC. Symptoms usually form within six hours of swallowing the bacteria and most people recover in 4-7 days without treatment.</p> <p>Children under age 5, adults 65 and older and people with weakened immune systems may experience more severe illness that may lead to hospitalization.</p> <p>Here is a list of the states where people have reported getting sick and how many cases in each state.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alabama - 3• Arkansas - 12

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California - 9 • Colorado - 1 • Connecticut - 4 • Florida - 5 • Georgia - 2 • Illinois - 37 • Indiana - 1 • Iowa - 3 • Kansas - 14 • Kentucky - 9 • Louisiana - 5 • Maryland - 48 • Massachusetts - 12 • Michigan - 9 • Minnesota - 23 • Mississippi - 2 • Missouri - 21 • Nebraska - 8 • New Jersey - 5 • New Mexico - 8 • New York - 12 • North Carolina - 14 • North Dakota - 4 • Ohio - 7 • Oklahoma - 98 • Oregon - 2 • Pennsylvania - 7 • South Carolina - 3 • South Dakota - 8 • Tennessee - 10 • Texas - 158 • Utah - 3 • Virginia - 59 • West Virginia - 1 • Wisconsin - 25
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Skagit Co. faces rising Covid cases
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/covid-19-coronavirus-cases-rising-skagit-county-washington/281-10a9cf20-af99-4093-8b28-6890081bcc67
GIST	<p>MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — COVID-19 cases are steadily rising again in Skagit County with just 58% of the population fully vaccinated against the virus.</p> <p>Skagit Regional Health is experiencing full ICUs and having to resort to treating patients in waiting rooms and hallways.</p> <p>"It's just a recipe for disaster," said Dr. Howard Leibrand, Skagit County's health officer.</p> <p>Data from the Health Department show COVID-19 cases are consistently climbing in Skagit County. The latest numbers show 553 people have tested positive for the virus out of every 100,000 people in the population, an indication of a potential sixth wave.</p> <p>That news prompted health officials to issue a warning to the public: "For our children's sake we are pleading with people to get vaccinated today."</p>

	<p>COVID-19 cases have been dropping in King County where proof of vaccination is now required to enter most businesses. So, why is there no mandate in Skagit County?</p> <p>"I don't think that's the reason for our continued elevated numbers right now," Leibrand said. "We have the capability to test more and our demographics are a little different."</p> <p>Those demographics include large Hispanic and farmworker communities where the vaccination rate hovers at barely 50%.</p> <p>"Those populations are sometimes living in crowded, inadequate housing. So once the disease gets in one or two people in that family group, or that housing group, everybody gets it," Leibrand said.</p> <p>At Skagit Regional Health, which serves Skagit, Island and north Snohomish counties, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Connie Davis said just 30 of the 2,200 staffers lost their jobs for refusing to be vaccinated.</p> <p>She conceded, however, that workers are tired and frustrated. She said she's worried what a sixth wave could bring.</p> <p>"I am concerned that it could climb. There's no question about that," Davis said. "I'm also concerned about another variant that could develop that will change the paradigm."</p> <p>As winter approaches, Leibrand said it shouldn't take more people dying to bring the case rates in Skagit County down.</p> <p>"That's herd immunity and herd immunity comes at a huge cost. Vaccination, however comes at almost no cost," Leibrand said.</p> <p>As far as Halloween goes, health officials said trick-or-treating is safe, but indoor parties should be avoided.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 North Cascades Highway closes Nov 15th
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/north-cascades-highway-closing-season-nov-15/FW5FTPZG2NAFNEAIYDYSZU4ILU/
GIST	<p>With winter just around the corner, the North Cascades Highway, also known as SR 20, is closing soon for the season.</p> <p>The closure is scheduled for Monday, Nov. 15, but may close sooner depending on the amount of snow and ice that arrives.</p> <p>Mid-November is generally when the pass closes for the winter as snow, ice and avalanche danger make it unsafe for drivers and maintenance crews to be in the area.</p> <p>Typically the seasonal closure is done on a case-by-case basis, but for the first time WSDOT set a closure date to allow more time for travelers to plan.</p> <p>The closure points will be milepost 134/Ross Dam Trailhead on the west side and milepost 171/Silver Star Gate on the east side.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Officials worry: possible 6th Covid wave
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/amid-current-trends-state-officials-worry-now-about-a-possible-sixth-covid-wave

GIST	<p>Washington state's top health officials said Wednesday that he does not like the trend of COVID-19 cases leveling off as the state tries to emerge from its current fifth wave.</p> <p>Dr. Scott Lindquist said the state must do everything it can to prevent a sixth wave.</p> <p>Of particular concern is the continued pressure on hospitals with staffing issues and the continued influx of unvaccinated COVID patients.</p> <p>There have been 40,000 hospitalizations and 8,500 deaths linked to COVID-19.</p> <p>"So, this is a very humbling pandemic that continues to go on," Lindquist said, adding that he is concerned that COVID cases are not dropping like they had hoped, most likely due to indoor gatherings, the change in the weather, lax compliance with face masks and those still refusing to get vaccinated. "All of these are contributing to us stalling out at a high rate. Now this is the fifth wave. I certainly hope we can turn this around before it becomes a sixth wave or an incredibly high plateau of the fifth wave."</p> <p>King County on Monday launched a program requiring people to show a negative COVID test or proof of vaccination in order to go to restaurants, bars and gyms.</p> <p>Asked if the state would expand that requirement statewide, Lacy Fehrenbach, deputy secretary for COVID response, said, "We are always looking at what our own communities, other states, other large cities are doing to curtail the spread of COVID-19 or prevent transmission of COVID-19, but no decisions made at this time."</p> <p>But she did say that starting Nov. 15 there is going to be a statewide requirement for vaccine proof or negative test at indoor events of 1,000 people or more and outdoor events attended by 10,000 or more.</p> <p>Lindquist said there is a light at the end of the tunnel.</p> <p>"The future of all of these trends really depends on how well we all respond to vaccination, masking and distancing," he said. "And so, with that I'm sure we're going to be able to turn this around as we have with all of these other waves."</p> <p>U.S. Senator Patty Murray announced the federal government has approved a \$44 million FEMA grant that pays for more than 1,000 health care workers to help with hospital staffing shortage around the state.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/28 Germany Covid cases biggest leap in weeks
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-covid-caseload-makes-biggest-leap-two-weeks-2021-10-28/
GIST	<p>BERLIN, Oct 28 (Reuters) - Germany's coronavirus caseload took its biggest jump in two weeks on Thursday, with over 28,000 new infections, the Robert Koch Institute said, adding heft to worries about restrictions this winter.</p> <p>The number of new infections per 100,000 people over seven days - one of the metrics used to determine policy measures - stands at 130.2, up 12.2 points from 118.0 the previous day. New infections have been steadily creeping up since mid-October.</p> <p>The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units (ICUs) has risen 15% within a week, the head of the German Hospital Federation (DKG), Gerald Gass, told the Redaktionsnetwork Deutschland media group.</p> <p>If the trend continues, he said, there could be 3,000 cases in the ICU in two weeks.</p> <p>"Even if the hospitals could handle it, it would not be possible without constraints on normal operations," Gass said.</p>

	<p>SPD health expert Karl Lauterbach told the Rheinische Post newspaper that lockdowns or school closures were not on the cards, but the decision on whether to lift safety measures such as mask mandates would depend on the situation in spring.</p> <p>The three political parties in talks to form the next government have said they do not support extending a pandemic-related state of emergency set to expire on Nov. 25.</p> <p>Instead, they have recommended amending Germany's Infection Protection Act to allow states to impose protective measures.</p> <p>State leaders fear a patchwork of different regulations in each region could make them harder to enforce.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 FDNY union: ignore mandate
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/politics/fdny-firefighters-newyorkcity-mandate/2021/10/27/id/1042268/
GIST	<p>The head of the New York City firefighters union told his members on Wednesday to keep working despite COVID-19 vaccine mandates.</p> <p>Andrew Ansbro, FDNY Firefighters Association president, told the "Brian Kilmeade Show" that "right now, 45% of New York firefighters are unvaccinated." Ansbro thinks that Mayor Bill de Blasio's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for state workers will lead to "30% to 40% of firehouses" being closed down.</p> <p>The mayor has scheduled a deadline for all city employees to get a vaccination on Friday by 5 p.m. or risk being sent home without pay.</p> <p>Ansbro warned that come Friday, city officials "are going to be faced with the stark reality that they're going to have to close firehouses down. And there is no other way to do it. ... The manpower, the staffing just is not there. And the response times are going to go through the roof.</p> <p>"We're just not going to be able to get to emergencies on time. Fires are going to burn longer. Heart attack victims are going to be lying on the floor longer. People stuck in elevators are going to be stuck there for hours, if not days."</p> <p>Ansbro added that the vaccinations are unfair, especially in light of the lack of support that firefighters with cancer have received following Sept. 11.</p> <p>"Right now, the FDNY is losing two to three firefighters, dying every month, due to 9/11-related cancer, and they're doing nothing about it. There's a mandate from the state ... that every New York City employee gets four hours off in order to get a cancer screening. ... The FDNY has refused to give firefighters" that time off to get a cancer screening Ansbro added.</p> <p>"But now they want to force a mandate" that firefighters don't need because they have already been sick.</p> <p>Ansbro concluded that the COVID-19 vaccine mandate being issued to New York City employees is "immoral."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Meat industry: 59,000 cases, 269 deaths
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-pandemics-congress-72e766be17083ad819ea3ac26cb7fb76
GIST	<p>OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — At least 59,000 meatpacking workers caught COVID-19 and 269 workers died when the virus tore through the industry last year, which is significantly more than previously thought, according to a new U.S. House report released Wednesday.</p>

The meatpacking industry was one of the early epicenters of the coronavirus pandemic, with workers standing shoulder-to-shoulder along production lines. The U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, which examined internal documents from five of the biggest meatpacking companies, said companies could have done more to [protect their workers](#).

The new estimate of infections in the industry is nearly three times higher than the 22,400 that [the United Food and Commercial Workers Union has said](#) were infected or exposed. And the true number could be even higher because the companies' data didn't generally include coronavirus cases confirmed by outside testing or self reported by employees.

At the height of the outbreaks in the spring of 2020, U.S. meatpacking production fell to about 60% of normal as several major plants were forced to temporarily close for deep cleaning and safety upgrades or operated at slower speeds because of worker shortages. The report said companies were slow to take protective steps such as distributing protective equipment and installing barriers between work stations.

"Instead of addressing the clear indications that workers were contracting the coronavirus at alarming rates due to conditions in meatpacking facilities, meatpacking companies prioritized profits and production over worker safety, continuing to employ practices that led to crowded facilities in which the virus spread easily," the report said.

Martin Rosas, who represents a UFCW chapter based in Kansas with over 17,000 members in three states, said the union pressed companies for better protections.

"The harsh reality is that many of the companies were slow to act in the early days of the outbreak, and whatever progress that was achieved was due to the union demanding action," Rosas said.

The report is based on documents from JBS, Tyson Foods, Smithfield Foods, Cargill and National Beef. Together they control over 80% of the beef market and over 60% of the pork market nationwide.

The North American Meat Institute trade group defended the industry's response to the pandemic. And Cargill, Tyson, Smithfield and JBS released statements Wednesday saying they worked aggressively to meet federal health and safety standards and took additional measures to protect their employees, such as conducting widespread testing and urging employees to get vaccinated.

"The health and safety of our team members always comes first and our response since the onset of the pandemic has demonstrated that commitment, with an investment of more than \$760 million to date. We have taken aggressive action to keep the virus out of our facilities and adopted hundreds of safety measures that often outpaced federal guidance and industry standards," JBS spokeswoman Nikki Richardson said.

The companies expressed regret at the toll the virus has taken.

"Even one illness or loss of life to COVID-19 is one too many, which is why we've taken progressive action from the start of the pandemic to protect the health and safety of our workers," Tyson spokesman Gary Mickelson said.

The report said infection rates were especially high at some meatpacking plants between the spring of 2020 and early 2021. At a JBS plant in Hyrum, Utah, 54% of the workforce contracted the virus. Nearly 50% of workers at a Tyson plant in Amarillo, Texas, were infected. And 44% of employees at National Beef's plant in Tama, Iowa, caught COVID-19.

The report said internal documents show Smithfield aggressively pushed back against government safety recommendations after experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention inspected its pork plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, after a major outbreak. A few days earlier, Smithfield's CEO told the CEO of National Beef in an email that "Employees are afraid to come to work."

	<p>Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin said the Occupational Safety and Health Administration needs to do more to protect meatpacking workers.</p> <p>“Some of these companies are treating the workers in the plants not much better than the animals that go through them,” Raskin said.</p> <p>Debbie Berkowitz, with Georgetown University’s Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, said the industry was slow to respond and federal regulators didn’t force companies to act.</p> <p>“When the pandemic hit, of course it was going to hit meatpacking plants really hard and really fast,” said Berkowitz, a former OSHA official who testified Wednesday. “What was the industry’s response — not to protect workers and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, not to separate workers 6 feet apart, which was the earlier guidance that came out in late February — but to just keep on going.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Childcare crisis hampers economy
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-pandemics-economy-seattle-17db11434b2bb82a3d7fb3fc82003514
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — After Bryan Kang’s son was born in July, the occupational therapist and his wife, a teacher, started looking for child care in the Los Angeles area. The couple called eight day care centers: Some didn’t have spots for months; others stopped taking their calls and some never answered at all.</p> <p>So with no viable options, Kang scrambled to find a new job that would allow him to work remotely.</p> <p>“I told my manager, ‘Hey, by the end of the month, I have to transition out,’” Kang said. “They were very supportive and very understanding because they’re all mothers. But now there’s one less body to see patients.”</p> <p>Kang said he’s fortunate he found a job teaching online classes, but the unexpected career pivot forced him to take an 11% pay cut.</p> <p>The truth is, even if he could find a day care spot for his now 3-month-old son, the \$2,500 monthly cost of infant care is so high that taking a lower-paying job so he can work from home and care for the baby is the most financially sensible thing to do.</p> <p>The child care business has for years operated in a broken, paradoxical market: low wages for workers and high costs for consumers. Yet the critical service somehow managed to limp along.</p> <p>Now, the pandemic has made clear what many experts had long warned: The absence of reliable and affordable child care limits which jobs people can accept, makes it harder to climb the corporate ladder and ultimately restricts the ability of the broader economy to grow.</p> <p>“Early learning is no longer seen as just a women’s issue or a children’s issue. It’s really seen as an economic issue. It’s about workforce participation,” said Mario Cardona, policy chief for Child Care Aware of America. “It’s about employers who don’t have to worry about whether they’ll be able to rely upon employees.”</p> <p>Child Care Aware estimates 9% of licensed child care programs have permanently closed since the pandemic began, based on its tally of nearly 16,000 shuttered centers and in-home day cares in 37 states between December 2019 and March 2021.</p> <p>Now, each teacher resignation, coronavirus exposure and day care closure reveals an industry on the brink, with wide-reaching implications for an entire economy’s workforce.</p>

The national crisis has forced many people — mostly women — to leave their jobs, reshaping the child care crisis as not just a problem for parents of young children, but also anyone who depends on them. It has contributed to a labor shortage, which in turn has hurt businesses and made it more difficult for customers to access goods and services.

“The decisions we make about the availability of child care today will shape the U.S. macroeconomy for decades to come by influencing who returns to work, what types of jobs parents take and the career path they are able to follow,” said Betsey Stevenson, an economist at the University of Michigan.

President Joe Biden has pledged an unprecedented burst of federal spending in hopes of fixing the child care market. At a recent town hall in Baltimore, he assured parents they would “not have to pay more than 7% of your income for child care.” Federal money would go directly to care centers to cover costs in excess of the 7% cap. This means the median U.S. family earning \$86,372 would pay \$6,046 annually for child care.

Biden’s plan also includes universal pre-kindergarten, which could further reduce child care expenses for families. The expanded monthly payments from the child tax credit approved in Biden’s \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package would be extended for another year. The president also proposed increasing the size of a tax credit for the cost of child care, all of which should help improve access for families.

The Congressional Budget Office has yet to score the costs as the measures are still being negotiated ahead of Biden’s departure Thursday for the G-20 conference in Rome. But Donald Schneider, a former chief economist for the House Ways and Means Committee who now works for the consultancy Cornerstone Macro, estimates the child care and pre-kindergarten support would cost \$465 billion over 10 years. The one-year price-tag of the expanded child tax credit would be around \$120 billion. The credit would cost an additional \$940 billion if renewed for nine more years.

It remains to be seen what survives in the brutal negotiations in Congress for Biden’s broad family services agenda, but the pandemic is proving to be a make-or-break catalyst for the future of the child care industry.

At Forever Young Daycare in the Seattle suburb of Mountlake Terrace, Amy McCoy is burning out fast.

She’s spent half of this year trying to hire a new assistant for her in-home child care, but until then, the former public school teacher works 50 hours a week caring for children herself, and more doing the cooking, cleaning and administrative work needed to run her business.

“At what point is my day care more important than my own family?” McCoy asked.

One of McCoy’s assistants, who worked there for five years, quit the \$19-an-hour job in April for a \$35-an-hour job nannying. McCoy has posted the opening for an entry-level assistant on Indeed and Facebook, offering \$16 per hour — nearly 20% more than the state minimum wage. She’s gotten few responses and all turned her down over pay, making hiring impossible without a tuition increase.

“Nobody wants to work for what I can afford to pay right now,” McCoy said. “I absolutely believe these are \$20-an-hour employees, but I hate that, most likely, I will have to raise tuition.”

The U.S. Treasury Department noted in a September report that child care workers earn on average \$24,230. More than 15% of the industry’s workers live below the poverty line in 41 states and half need public assistance. The sector has high levels of turnover, with 26% to 40% leaving their job each year. Nor is there much room to give among child care centers that tend to operate on profits of 1% or less.

In nearby Edmonds, Briana McFadden shuttered her business, Cocoon Child Care Center, last month due to the stress of the pandemic, though McFadden thinks she would have stayed open if there were government subsidies to stabilize the industry.

	<p>In 12 years in business, McFadden said she never raised tuition and was the rare day care in the affluent northern Seattle suburbs to accept low-income families on a state subsidy. In pre-pandemic times, Cocoon employed seven people to care for 37 children. Now McFadden plans to open a convenience store.</p> <p>“It really wasn’t worth it to continue,” McFadden said, her voice quivering with emotion. “Day care is a hard business.”</p> <p>Tatum Russell’s livelihood depended as much on McFadden’s day care as the restaurant that employs her to hand-bread seafood.</p> <p>During a COVID-19-related day care closure in August, the single mom could only stitch together help from relatives for some of the time. Russell ultimately had to miss four days of work.</p> <p>“It’s been a nightmare, and it’s not over,” Russell said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Global food prices set to soar
SOURCE	https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Global-Food-Prices-Set-To-Soar-As-The-Oil-And-Gas-Crunch-Continues.html
GIST	<p>The potential for a knock-on effect of rising fuel prices to be felt by other industries is becoming more likely, as oil and gas prices continue to rise to an all-time high, companies are finding it hard to maintain their costs and may have to shift this burden to the consumer any day now.</p> <p>Petrol prices have risen higher and higher this year, as oil makes a comeback in 2021 following a difficult year of pandemic restrictions and low demand. This has, of course, been aided by the OPEC+ curbs on production that restricted oil output across member states for the first half of 2021. And while production levels are slowly rising, some countries are finding it difficult to reach new OPEC targets as they revive their oil and gas industries, meaning the global shortage continues.</p> <p>Looking at the price of gasoline over the last 20 years, you can see that the global average has doubled, from \$0.60 a litre in 2001 to \$1.20 a litre today. This year, in particular, the increase in demand as economies open back up following over a year of restrictions, added to a supply shortage across much of the world, means prices are nearing an all-time-high.</p> <p>And it seems that the trend is not over yet, with experts suggesting that motorists across Europe and Asia can expect high petrol and diesel costs well into the winter months as the Brent benchmark stays around \$85 a barrel; demand for fuel increases; and taxes on motor fuel in countries such as India, France and the U.K. continue to stay at around 60 percent of the retail price of petrol and diesel.</p> <p>But what does this trend mean for other industries? As well as rising fuel prices, we are seeing the cost of food and drink increase, with average food prices hitting a decade high and costing around one-third more this September than last. Fuel costs cannot be blamed as the sole catalyst in rising food prices, as harvests hit by hot weather and Covid restrictions, an increase in global demand – with a dramatically cold 2020 winter and hot 2021 summer, and disruptions in the supply chain, are also to blame. But if transport and farming costs continue to rise, our food bill is likely to keep climbing.</p> <p>Kavita Chacko, a senior economist at CARE Ratings in India explains, "High fuel prices put pressure on overall price levels and poses a downside risk to the recovery in mobility and the economy in general." Moreover, "The rise in transportation costs have been feeding into costs across segments and could be a dampener for consumer spending," she stated.</p> <p>With globalisation meaning our food no longer comes from the local farm but is mostly shipped across the globe, as well as the rising price of fertilisers, the food supply chain is finding it hard to maintain stable prices.</p>

Abdolreza Abbassian, Senior Economist at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation's [told Bloomberg](#), "It's this combination of things that's beginning to get very worrying." "It's not just the isolated food-price numbers, but all of them together. I don't think anyone two or three months ago was expecting the energy prices to get this strong."

But the food supply chain is not the only thing we have to worry about when it comes to the knock-on effect of high oil prices. Any industry that relies on oil for fuel, fertilizers, petrochemicals, or any number of other related products is going to feel the pinch in the coming months, if they don't already. This means the cost of many of our household products and basic expenses could soon increase.

This ticking time bomb has led Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis for OPIS by IHSMarkit, to [state](#), "every nook and cranny of the economy" could be affected. "Everything that moves tends to move cross-country by truck or by train, so we're looking at a more expensive year for that."

Essentially, anything that is used on freight transportation and any industry that relies on fuel or petrochemicals will likely be affected by the ongoing hike in oil prices. And while consumers are worried about petrol and diesel prices at present, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The hardest hit will, once again, be those living in developing economies that are still struggling to recover from the impact of the pandemic. With an uneven economic recovery, due to low vaccine rollout figures and Covid restrictions needing to continue across several low-income countries, high fuel prices and the spillover effect on other industries, particularly food, could see governments having to provide economic stimuli to the poorest populations, as well imposing price caps on fuel.

One thing's for certain, it's going to get worse before it gets better. Those working in agriculture and industry are already taking the hit and it's only a matter of time until this price burden is shifted to the consumer, not only at the pump but across a multitude of areas of our daily lives.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 California virus cases stop falling
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/california-virus-cases-stop-falling-governor-urges-caution-80824310
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- California Gov. Gavin Newsom rolled up his sleeve Wednesday and received a coronavirus vaccine booster shot, a move he encouraged others to take as the state heads into the time of year that in 2020 ushered in the deadliest spike of COVID-19 cases.</p> <p>Much has changed since then — 88% of those 18 and older in California have received at least one dose of a vaccine that didn't exist last fall and millions have survived contracting the virus and have a level of natural immunity, though it's unclear for how long.</p> <p>Still, millions are not vaccinated and new cases and hospitalizations have flattened after a steady two-month decline that saw California boast the nation's lowest infection rate. State models show a gradual increase in hospitalizations in the next month.</p> <p>Newsom got his shot at a health clinic in Oakland from Dr. Mark Ghaly, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency. He said it was painless and then flexed in celebration. After a 15-minute break to ensure no immediate side effects, he issued a warning about the dangers of the upcoming holiday season.</p> <p>"This is an incredibly important time because what tends to happen this time — it happened last year — is our attention wanes," Newsom said. "We start focusing on other things. And as a consequence, we can let our guard down."</p> <p>The state seems to have reached what Ghaly called a plateau after its steady decline in cases and hospitalizations since the summer surge of the delta variant of the virus.</p>

Models show coronavirus hospitalizations increasing slightly over the next month, from about 3,800 in hospitals now to about 4,460 by Thanksgiving.

The models forecast a gradual drop in intensive care patients but with a troubling upward curve starting in about two weeks. Deaths are expected to continue their inexorable climb, adding nearly 3,000 to reach a pandemic total of 74,000 by Thanksgiving week.

The rate at which each infected person spreads the disease, known as the R-effective, remains below 1 statewide but had been creeping up since mid-September until another recent dip. Anything below 1 means the number of infected persons will decrease.

That pattern is mirrored in most regions of the state, but the rate in the Greater Sacramento area has edged back above 1, meaning the virus will start to spread.

Still the numbers are a far cry from what the state experienced less than a year ago.

At the end of last year and into January, there were single days when more than 50,000 new cases were recorded, compared to the state's average of about 5,900 new cases per day in the last two weeks. Nearly 21,000 Californians were hospitalized at the peak and more than 18,500 people died in January alone.

Other experts are not expecting anything like last winter's deadliest surge, even as people spend more time inside together given the approaching chill, poor weather and holidays.

"I'm not as pessimistic as the state or the governor," said Dr. Lee Riley, chairman of the Division of Infectious Disease and Vaccinology at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health. "The name of the game really is vaccination."

Other places where winter conditions have already set in are not seeing significant jumps, he said. He does expect testing systems to be strapped as doctors and patients sort out the difference between the coronavirus and other respiratory diseases.

"Certainly the most mitigating factor is the immunity in the population," agreed Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Southern California.

Counterintuitively, he expects the hardest-hit and most vulnerable populations last time to enjoy the best protection now because they have built up a natural immunity. So areas like Los Angeles, which had disproportionate levels of infections, hospitalizations and deaths, are likely to be protected from a surge.

By contrast, Klausner expects the San Francisco Bay Area, with higher levels of vaccinations but fewer illnesses, is "going to be potentially the most susceptible to a surge because their immunity ... is mostly derived from vaccination, which we have learned is actually not as strong and durable as immunity that is acquired after infection."

California is prepositioning millions of small-dose Pfizer vaccines in anticipation that the federal government will give final approval to administer the shots to children aged 5-11 as early as the end of next week. About 3.5 million children would be eligible, or 9% of California residents, state epidemiologist Dr. Erica Pan said.

The state plans to mandate vaccinations for school children but that's not expected to kick in until the 2022-23 school year. Meantime, California will wait until after this winter to review its school masking requirement and then will look at typical indicators like the number of people who are vaccinated and the rate of transmissions and hospitalizations, Ghaly said.

Despite the governor's appeal for more people to be vaccinated or receive booster shots, the state government has a done poor job of policing its own rules.

Newsom was the first governor in the nation to mandate all state workers either get the coronavirus vaccine or submit to weekly testing. The policy went into effect Aug. 2, but the Los Angeles Times reported this week many state agencies ignored the deadline without consequences.

Data from the California Department of Human Resources showed about half of the 59,000 unvaccinated state workers were tested during the first week of October. In the Department of Motor Vehicles, where about 3,600 unvaccinated staffers are required to be tested, just 411 of them have been, the newspaper reported.

Critics said the state's blasé approach undermines the point of the mandate, which is to make sure state workers who interact with the public are protected and protect others.

Newsom said after the mandate the number of state workers vaccinated increased from 62% to 67%.

"We're doing something at scale that's never been done," Newsom said Wednesday. "So I like the progress we're making."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/28 New Zealand won't welcome tourists yet
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/zealand-eases-quarantine-tourists-80826408
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- New Zealand officials said Thursday they will gradually loosen their border quarantine requirements, which have been among the toughest in the world throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>But while the changes will make it easier for New Zealanders stranded abroad to return home, officials gave no date for when tourists might be welcomed back. That change is likely still months away.</p> <p>COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said that from next month, most people arriving in New Zealand would need to spend seven days in a quarantine hotel run by the military, half the previous requirement.</p> <p>He said some new arrivals from low-risk Pacific island countries could skip quarantine altogether and isolate at home.</p> <p>He said the new rules were an interim step ahead of broader reopening measures that would be gradually introduced once more than 90% of New Zealanders aged 12 and over were fully vaccinated. So far, 72% of eligible people have had both shots.</p> <p>The change follows a growing outcry from New Zealanders who have been trying to return home but have been unable to secure spots in the quarantine system. Some have resorted to legal action.</p> <p>"I acknowledge that there's a lot of pressure there. My message to the people who are keen to get back into New Zealand is: There isn't very long to wait now," Hipkins said. "And encouraging their fellow New Zealanders to get fully vaccinated will help us get to that point faster."</p> <p>Hipkins said he expected most new arrivals would be able to isolate at home by sometime in the first quarter of next year. He said the first priority was New Zealanders and those with valid visas.</p> <p>"Tourists are more of a challenge, in that they don't necessarily have somewhere to isolate on arrival," Hipkins said. "But we'll work our way through all of that."</p> <p>Political opponents said the changes didn't go far enough and that fully vaccinated travelers returning home posed little risk.</p>

Return to Top	<p>Before the pandemic began, more than 3 million tourists visited New Zealand each year, and the industry was among the nation's largest earners of foreign income.</p> <p>For more than a year after the pandemic began, the strict quarantine system helped New Zealand remain almost completely virus-free and allowed life to return to normal.</p> <p>But an outbreak of the more contagious delta variant in Auckland more than two months ago has proved impossible to extinguish, forcing officials to abandon their previous zero-tolerance approach in favor of a suppression strategy.</p> <p>With the virus continuing to spread in Auckland, which remains in lockdown, the border requirements had begun to seem outdated.</p> <p>Thursday's announcement came after officials said two people in the city of Christchurch had caught the virus after one returned from Auckland. There was no immediate evidence the virus was spreading further in the city.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/27 Indonesia warily weighs holiday travel
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/indonesia-warily-weighs-holiday-travel-virus-concerns-80829208
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia -- Indonesians are looking ahead warily toward the holiday travel season, anxious for crucial tourist spending but worried an influx of visitors could spread the coronavirus just as its pandemic situation seems to be subsiding.</p> <p>After seeing infection and death rates soar in July and August, officials said this week they are sticking to plans to allow travel with some limitations. They expect nearly 20 million people to vacation in the popular islands of Java and Bali.</p> <p>The archipelago nation with the world's fourth highest population has seen dramatic improvements since the devastating midyear months, but its vaccination rollout is lagging behind most others in Southeast Asia. Experts also question whether the official figures tell the true story, saying there is evidence many COVID-19 cases are going undetected and unreported, suggesting widespread travel could cause a resurgence.</p> <p>"There is some progression in terms of number of cases and, of course, in mortality, but what the government reports doesn't always represent or reflect the real situation in communities," said Dicky Budiman, an Indonesian epidemiologist and academic adviser to the government.</p> <p>Indonesia is transitioning to treating the coronavirus as an endemic disease rather than one that can be eliminated in the population. It is seeking to balance the idea of living with COVID-19 with precautions to minimize the risk of another broad outbreak.</p> <p>After announcing that year-end travel would be permitted, the government on Wednesday cancelled the Christmas Eve holiday — on a Friday this year — in an effort to discourage vacationing somewhat.</p> <p>President Joko Widodo also urged regional officials to manage and regulate visitors to minimize crowds.</p> <p>"We hope that we can manage Christmas and the New Year well, because almost all epidemiologists are afraid that what triggers a third wave could be during Christmas and New Year," he said in a statement.</p> <p>The cancellation of the Dec. 24 holiday prompted cries of protest from the predominantly Muslim nation's Christian minority, highlighting the challenge of balancing safety restrictions with individual freedoms.</p> <p>Indonesia has reported nearly 4.25 million cases and more than 143,000 deaths from COVID-19 among its 270 million people. As hospitals became overwhelmed by sick patients in July and ran out of beds and</p>

oxygen supplies, the 7-day rolling average of deaths soared to more than 1,700 by the end of the month and into early August — though on a per capita basis neighbor Malaysia suffered even worse.

Since then, however, the situation has improved dramatically and today Indonesia boasts among the lowest case and death rates in the region.

As things began to turn around, the government announced at the end of August that it was relaxing some restrictions, and by earlier this month had gone ahead with plans to reopen the resort island of Bali to some categories of international travelers. So far, no significant increase in the spread of the virus has been reported, though the number of visitors has remained low and exclusively from domestic locations so far, with no foreign flights yet.

But Indonesia's vaccination rate is low compared to others in the region — raising fears a new outbreak could spread rapidly again and lead to large numbers of people requiring hospitalization. About 25% of Indonesian's eligible population has been fully vaccinated, compared to 73% in Malaysia, 80% in Singapore, and even 41% in Thailand where the vaccine rollout was plagued with early delays.

Indonesia's vaccine campaign made a quick start centered in cities, but administering shots has become much more difficult on the archipelago nation, which consists of five major islands and thousands of smaller ones. The smaller, more rural areas also have significantly more limited health care facilities, meaning any major outbreak could cause major devastation.

Its actual number of cases could also be much higher than reported, due to inadequate testing and tracing, Budiman said. Studies suggest many asymptomatic cases have gone unreported, and in addition, many people are thought to have treated themselves at home either because they did not want to go to the hospital or because there was no room for them.

One study of antibodies of Jakarta residents done midyear by the University of Indonesia's School of Public Health and others found that nearly half of people tested had been infected with COVID-19. Budiman said wider research suggests that as many as 15% of Indonesians — with some estimates as high as 29% — have been infected since the start of the pandemic.

The upside is that many unvaccinated Indonesians likely have developed a natural immunity, but Budiman predicts it will not be enough to prevent another surge, noting the protection of early vaccinations may be waning and that the widely used Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines are proving less effective against the more contagious delta variant.

"Around 50 percent of our population is still very vulnerable because they don't have immunity, and we have problems with the vaccine itself," he said.

The situation makes it all the more important for the government to enforce existing health and safety regulations as it seeks to strike a balance between economic interests and managing the pandemic, said John Fleming, the Asia-Pacific head of health for the Red Cross.

"It's critical as restrictions are eased that all public health measures are maintained, including high levels of testing, mask-wearing, maintaining physical distance and faster rates of COVID-19 vaccinations to prevent future deadly waves of this virus," he said.

In announcing the cancellation of the Christmas Eve holiday earlier this week, Human Development and Culture Minister Muhadjir Effendy expressed hope that regulations on travel, including requiring people using public transportation to have at least one vaccination, and negative PCR tests for air travelers, would be enough to mitigate dangers.

"What we have to really consider, no matter how strict and conservatively we apply various provisions in order to inhibit and prevent the transmission of COVID-19, our economy must continue to move," he said.

HEADLINE	10/28 Cost of vaccine reluctance eastern Europe
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/vaccine-reluctance-eastern-europe-brings-high-covid-cost-80829543
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Truck driver Andriy Melnik never took the coronavirus seriously. With a friend, he bought a fake vaccination certificate so his travel documents would appear in order when he hauled cargo to other parts of Europe.</p> <p>His view changed after the friend caught COVID-19 and ended up in an intensive care unit on a ventilator.</p> <p>"It's not a tall tale. I see that this disease kills, and strong immunity wouldn't be enough -- only a vaccine can offer protection," said Melnik, 42, as he waited in Kyiv to get his shot. "I'm really scared and I'm pleading with doctors to help me correct my mistake."</p> <p>He added: "Death from coronavirus appears much closer than I imagined."</p> <p>Ukraine is suffering through a surge in coronavirus infections, along with other parts of Eastern Europe and Russia. While vaccines are plentiful, there is a widespread reluctance to get them in many countries — though notable exceptions include the Baltic nations, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary.</p> <p>The slow pace of vaccinations in Eastern Europe is rooted in several factors, including public distrust and past experience with other vaccines, said Catherine Smallwood, WHO Europe COVID-19 incident manager.</p> <p>"At the end of the day, we're seeing low vaccine uptake in a whole swath of countries across that part of the region," she told The Associated Press. "Historical issues around vaccines come into play. In some countries, the whole vaccine issue is politicized, in any case."</p> <p>Russia on Thursday recorded 1,159 deaths in 24 hours — its largest daily toll since the pandemic began — with only about a third of the country's nearly 146 million people fully vaccinated. The Kremlin ordered a national nonworking period starting this week and lasting until Nov. 7.</p> <p>In Ukraine, only 16% of the adult population is fully vaccinated — the second-lowest share in Europe after Armenia's rate of slightly over 7%.</p> <p>Authorities in Ukraine are requiring teachers, government employees and other workers to get fully vaccinated by Nov. 8 or face a suspension of their pay. In addition, proof of vaccination or a negative test is now needed to board planes, trains and long-distance buses.</p> <p>This has created a booming black market in counterfeit documents. Fake vaccination certificates sell for the equivalent of \$100-\$300. There's even a phony version of the government's digital app, with bogus certificates already installed, said Mykhailo Fedorov, minister for digital transformation.</p> <p>Last week, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy chaired a meeting on how to combat the counterfeits. Police said they suspect workers at 15 hospitals of being involved in issuing false vaccination documents.</p> <p>Police have opened 800 criminal cases into such fakes and deployed 100 mobile units to track down their holders, said Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky. They even caught a former lawmaker who had produced a fake vaccination document upon returning to Ukraine last week.</p> <p>The low vaccination rate has led to the rapid spread of COVID-19, putting new stress on the country's already overworked health care system.</p> <p>The surgical ward of a hospital in the town of Biliaivka, near the Black Sea port of Odesa, is now treating only coronavirus patients, with 50 of its 52 beds filled. Drugs and oxygen are in short supply, and some hospital personnel are leaving their jobs.</p>

“We are on the verge of catastrophe, pushed by aggressive opponents of vaccination and the lack of funds,” said Dr. Serhiy Shvets, the head of the ward. “Regrettably, five workers of my ward have quit over the past week.”

The situation looks similar at a 120-bed hospital in the western city of Chernivtsi, where Dr. Olha Koberko says she has 126 patients in grave condition.

“I’m weeping in despair when I see that 99% of patients in serious condition with COVID-19 are unvaccinated, and those people could have protected themselves,” the infectious disease specialist told AP. “We are left struggling to save them without sufficient amount of drugs and resources.”

The current surge seems especially lethal, Koberko said, with 10-23 patients dying daily at her hospital, compared with fewer than six per day last spring. The share of patients in their 30s and 40s has grown considerably, she added.

She blames widespread vaccine skepticism, influenced by social media and religious beliefs.

“Fake stories have spread widely, making people believe in microchips and genetic mutations,” Koberko said. “Some Orthodox priests have openly and aggressively urged people not to get vaccinated, and social networks have been filled with the most absurd rumors. Ukrainians have learned to distrust any authorities’ initiatives, and vaccination isn’t an exclusion.”

Lidia Buiko, 72, chose to get the Chinese Sinovac shot, citing a falsehood that the Western vaccines contained microchips to control the population.

“Priests have urged us to think twice about getting immunized — it would be impossible to get rid of the chip,” she said as she waited in Kyiv.

Vaccine hesitancy exists even among medical workers. Shvets said 30% of the employees at his hospital in Biliaivka have refused the shots, and Health Minister Viktor Lyashko admitted that about half of Ukrainian medical workers are still reluctant to get them.

Murat Sahin, UNICEF representative in Ukraine, said false and misleading information about COVID-19 poses a growing threat.

“The risks of misinformation to vaccination have never been higher — nor have the stakes,” he said.

Similar skepticism has been seen elsewhere in Eastern Europe, fueled by online misinformation, religious beliefs, distrust of government officials, and reliance on nontraditional treatments.

In Romania, where about 35% of adults are fully immunized, tighter restrictions took effect this week requiring vaccination certificates for many daily activities, such as going to the gym, the movies or shopping malls. There’s a 10 p.m. curfew, shops close at 9 p.m., bars and clubs will close for 30 days, and masks are mandatory in public.

So many are “afraid of the vaccines because of the immense (amount of) fake information that has flooded social media and TV,” said Dr. Dragos Zaharia of Bucharest’s Marius Nasta Institute of Pneumology.

“Every day, we see people arriving with shortness of breath and most of them are feeling sorry for not being vaccinated,” he told AP. “Every day we see people dying in our ward. We see scared people.”

Bulgaria, with only a quarter of the adult population fully vaccinated, also reported record infections and deaths this week. According to official data, Bulgaria has had the highest COVID-19 mortality rate in the 27-nation European Union in the past two weeks, and 94% of those deaths were of unvaccinated people.

	<p>Only 33% of Georgia's population has been fully vaccinated, and authorities launched a lottery with cash prizes for those getting shots. Still, Dr. Bidzina Kulumbegov bemoaned the slow pace of vaccinations.</p> <p>The government's information campaign "was not designed according to the peculiarities of our country. The emphasis should have been done, for instance, on the Georgian Orthodox Church, because we have many instances when priests are saying that vaccination is a sin," Kulumbegov said in televised remarks.</p> <p>For Melnik, the Ukrainian truck driver, the fear of getting COVID-19 outweighed all his other concerns.</p> <p>"You can't cheat this illness," he said. "You can buy a counterfeit certificate, but you can't buy antibodies. Ukrainians are slowly starting to realize that there is no alternative to vaccination."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/28 Moscow nonworking period: cases, deaths
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/moscow-starts-nonworking-period-infections-deaths-soar-80830143
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- The Russian capital on Thursday started a nonworking period intended to stem coronavirus infections as new daily cases and deaths from COVID-19 surged to all-time highs.</p> <p>The government coronavirus task force reported 1,159 deaths in 24 hours, the largest daily tally since the pandemic began. It has brought the country's official coronavirus death toll to 235,057, by far the highest in Europe.</p> <p>The number of new daily cases rose by 40,096, topping a previous record reached earlier this week.</p> <p>In a bid to contain the spread, Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered a nonworking period from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7 when most state organizations and private businesses are to suspend operations. He encouraged the most affected regions to start it sooner, and some introduced the measure earlier this week.</p> <p>Moscow followed Thursday, shutting most stores, kindergartens, schools, gyms and entertainment venues and allowing restaurants and cafes to be open only for takeout or delivery. Food stores, pharmacies and companies operating key infrastructure remained open.</p> <p>Access to museums, theaters, concert halls and other venues is limited to people holding digital codes on their smartphones to prove they have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19, a practice that will remain in place after Nov. 7.</p> <p>Putin has also instructed local officials to close nightclubs and other entertainment venues and ordered unvaccinated people older than 60 to stay home.</p> <p>The government hopes that the nonworking period will help curb the spread by keeping most people out of offices and public transportation, but many Russians quickly sought to take advantage of the time for a seaside vacation ahead of the long winter season.</p> <p>The worried authorities in southern Russia moved to shut down entertainment venues and limit access to restaurants and bars to prevent a spike in infections. The sales of package tours to Egypt and Turkey also jumped.</p> <p>Authorities have blamed the surging contagion and deaths on the laggard pace of vaccination. Only about 49 million Russians — about a third of the country's nearly 146 million people — are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Russia was the first country in the world to authorize a coronavirus vaccine in August 2020, proudly naming the shot Sputnik V after the first artificial satellite to showcase the country's scientific prowess. But the vaccination campaign has slumped amid widespread public skepticism blamed on conflicting signals from authorities.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/28 Experts: new data shows value of vaccines
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/holidays-looming-scientists-point-additional-data-showing-vaccines/story?id=80778122
GIST	<p>The summer surge of COVID-19, fueled by the delta variant, raised alarm bells among scientists and citizens alike that unlike prior variants of the virus, this one was different.</p> <p>Those fears solidified in July, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported an outbreak in Provincetown, Massachusetts, among mostly vaccinated people. This early data hinted, alarmingly, that the delta variant could be equally likely to spread among the vaccinated and the unvaccinated.</p> <p>Prior to the emergence of the delta variant, the risk of spreading the virus while vaccinated appeared to be so low the CDC said it was safe for vaccinated people to ditch their masks. But CDC Director Rochelle Walensky described the Provincetown findings as "concerning," and she promptly reversed the agency's mask guidelines for vaccinated people, prompting renewed fear and uncertainty about the efficacy of vaccines against variants.</p> <p>"I think the people who are really concerned are parents with children under 12 who are concerned that even if they're vaccinated, they could have a breakthrough infection and transmit it to their unvaccinated children," said Dr. Anna Durbin, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "I get that."</p> <p>But reassuringly, experts told ABC News, new studies show those fears may have been overblown.</p> <p>"Data are coming out that it's the opposite," said Dr. Paul Goepfert, an infectious disease physician and director of the Alabama Vaccine Research Clinic.</p> <p>The CDC's Provincetown study relied on something called viral load -- the amount of virus in a person's body. Researchers found that viral load levels were the same in vaccinated and unvaccinated people, prompting speculation the virus transmits just as readily among a vaccinated person. But viral loads change over time.</p> <p>"The problem with the Provincetown study is they just looked at one early point in time," said Dr. Paul Offit, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel member and director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.</p> <p>"That's just the first time point," Goepfert said. "If you keep following them, they're much less infectious more rapidly."</p> <p>Experts said there's no doubt the delta variant is among the most hyper-transmissible versions of the virus to have emerged. That hyper-transmissibility makes it possible to spread between vaccinated people. But that risk is still low. Even if the delta variant is transmissible among vaccinated people, new data suggests "it's for a shorter period of time" compared to the unvaccinated, said Durbin.</p> <p>In late July, researchers following patients in Singapore who had breakthrough infections with the delta variant after vaccinations with mRNA vaccines -- such as Pfizer and Moderna -- showed this exact decrease in infectivity. The study compared viral load counts during the first few weeks of each breakthrough infection. The delta variant caused the same peak viral load in all infected individuals -- a sign of active infection and risk of infectious spreading -- but the vaccinated group cleared the infection faster.</p> <p>Research by a separate group found similar results with the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is authorized in many countries outside the United States. In that study, researchers found that being vaccinated also appeared to shorten the time of breakthrough infection by the delta variant, according to an abstract presented at the Infectious Disease Society of America's conference in early October.</p>

	<p>Both studies have yet to be peer reviewed, but vaccine experts said they offer reassuring evidence that being vaccinated still dramatically reduces the risk of spreading the virus to a friend or loved one -- even the highly-transmissible delta variant.</p> <p>As families prepare for the 2021 holiday season, those who are vaccinated can rest assured that there's increasing evidence that being vaccinated remains the best defense against the spread of infection, especially in the event of an unlikely breakthrough case.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Trick-or-treating okay during pandemic?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/trick-treating-pandemic-80828904
GIST	<p>NEW YORK -- Is it OK to go trick-or-treating during the pandemic?</p> <p>It depends on the situation and your comfort level, but there are ways to minimize the risk of infection this Halloween.</p> <p>Whether you feel comfortable with your children trick-or-treating could depend on factors including how high the COVID-19 transmission rate is in your area and if the people your kids will be exposed to are vaccinated.</p> <p>But trick-or-treating is an outdoor activity that makes it easy to maintain a physical distance, notes Emily Sickbert-Bennett, an infectious disease expert at the University of North Carolina. To prevent kids crowding in front of doors, she suggests neighbors coordinating to spread out trick-or-treating.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says outdoor activities are safer for the holidays, and to avoid crowded, poorly ventilated spaces. If you attend a party inside, the agency says people who aren't vaccinated — including children who aren't yet eligible for the shots — should wear a well-fitting mask, not just a Halloween costume mask. In areas with high COVID-19 transmission rates, even the fully vaccinated should wear masks inside.</p> <p>It's generally safe for children to ring doorbells and collect candy, since the coronavirus spreads mainly through respiratory droplets and the risk of infection from surfaces is considered low. But it's still a good idea to bring along hand sanitizer that kids can use before eating treats.</p> <p>For adults, having a mask on hand when you open the door to pass out candy is important.</p> <p>“You probably won’t necessarily know until you open the door how many people will be out there, whether they’ll be wearing masks, what age they’ll be, and how great they’ll be at keeping distance from you,” Sickbert-Bennett says.</p> <p>Another option if you want want to be extra cautious: Set up candy bowls away from front doors.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Green jet fuels ready for takeoff?
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/are-green-jet-fuels-finally-ready-for-takeoff/
GIST	<p>WHEN UNITED AIRLINES test pilot Ryan Smith took off from Houston earlier this month for a 90-minute flight over the Gulf of Mexico, he wasn't carrying any passengers, but he did have a special fuel powering the Boeing 737. One engine was burning standard petroleum-based aviation fuel from a Texas refinery, while the other was running on gas produced entirely from leftover cooking oil and grease from a factory in Los Angeles.</p> <p>Each engine burned about 600 gallons during the flight, according to United, and created about the same carbon emissions (12,660 pounds). But because the sustainable fuel is made from plant-based sources instead of petroleum, and because plants consume carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, it has a carbon footprint that's about 70 percent smaller.</p>

“What we were trying to do is demonstrate that the aircraft can operate in the same capacity with sustainable fuel as with blended fuel,” says Lauren Riley, United’s managing director for global environmental affairs and sustainability. “It did. This is a true step in the path of decarbonization.”

Imagine sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, as part of a big plant-fuel-engine carbon recycling loop, rather than a one-way ticket that sends carbon from a subterranean oil patch directly to the atmosphere. In fact, [federal government](#) and [industry estimates](#) hold that using SAF can reduce lifetime carbon emissions from 50 to 80 percent depending on the feedstock and type of energy used during manufacturing. The [Houston test flight](#) was the first time a commercial aircraft ran at least one engine on 100 percent SAF, which is currently limited to a 50/50 blend on passenger flights.

SAF is produced by refining various plant or animal feedstocks, waste oils from cooking, or solid waste. The Environmental Protection Agency has certified seven kinds so far, although others are in the works. SAF is a drop-in fuel, meaning it can be used without making modifications to existing jet engines. The refining process uses heat and chemical catalysts to turn these feedstocks into fuel, and many companies are using renewable solar or wind energy as their power sources to keep the process low-carbon. In order to reach their carbon reduction goals, SAF manufacturers have to keep track of the energy used in each step of the process, and they even hire auditors to certify their carbon footprint.

The Biden administration is encouraging airlines to use more of this fuel, but there’s just not enough to go around. Only two plants in the United States make SAF: the [World Energy](#) waste oil plant in Paramount, California, and [the Gevo facility](#) in Silsbee, Texas, which takes an alcohol-based compound made from corn called isobutanol and distills it into aviation fuel.

Because it’s so scarce, SAF costs two to four times as much as regular aviation fuel. Of the 4 billion gallons of jet fuel United buys each year, only about 1 million are SAF. “We’ve got some work to do,” says Riley. “But there’s not enough [SAF] to go around.”

Flying is dirty, at least in terms of global warming. A round-trip flight from New York to LA generates up to 2.4 metric tons of carbon dioxide, depending on the airline. That’s about the same emissions as you’d get from driving a passenger car 6,000 miles or burning 2,653 pounds of coal, according to [EPA calculations](#). Longer flights are even worse. Jetting from Denver to Paris generates 4.9 metric tons of carbon dioxide, while Miami to Shanghai spews out nearly 10 tons of CO₂, according to the Berlin-based [Atmosfair carbon flight calculator](#).

Carbon emissions from jet travel make up only 2.5 percent of global greenhouse gases, but experts worry that as the demand for air travel grows in developing parts of the world, so will that figure. Jet engines burning conventional aviation fuel also produce sulfur and nitrogen pollutants, water vapor, and contrails. These compounds amplify the overall contribution of jet travel to climate warming to an estimated 7 to 8 percent of global emissions, according to a study by US and European researchers published in January 2021 in the journal [Atmospheric Environment](#).

Last month, the [Biden administration announced](#) it would include a \$4.3 billion research program as well as tax credits for SAF manufacturers in the proposed \$3.5 trillion reconciliation bill that is currently being debated in Congress. The White House also said three federal agencies would work with a consortium of US airlines to boost the use of sustainable fuels to 3 billion gallons by 2030.

Right now, the government limits airlines to a 50 percent blend of SAF and conventional fuel, something that United officials are hoping to change following the results of the test flight. “We are showcasing that the aircraft can handle sustainable aviation fuel and the performance is technically the same,” Riley says. “This blending limit is perhaps not needed. We would like to see 100 percent of our airplanes fly on 100 percent SAF.”

Patrick Gruber, the CEO of Gevo, says that after a decade of manufacturing SAF, the technology is ready for a big scale-up that might happen if the Biden tax credits are passed and airlines continue their demand

for his green fuel. “The technology is well developed. The products are proven and certified to work,” Gruber says. “Right now, it’s about deploying capital, and making sure everybody can make money.”

Gevo announced plans for a new \$800 million facility in Lake Preston, South Dakota, that by the time it opens in 2024 will be able to make 45 million gallons of SAF a year, along with 350 million pounds of animal feed. To keep its carbon footprint low, the plant will run on renewable energy from a nearby wind farm, Gruber says.

Instead of using plants or waste oils, some entrepreneurs want to go even further by manufacturing SAF out of thin air. Well, actually by a neat chemistry trick that combines a carbon molecule pulled from CO₂ in the atmosphere with a hydrogen molecule split from water. The result is a sustainable hydrocarbon fuel, according to Nicolas Flanders, cofounder of [Twelve](#), a startup spun out of a Stanford University chemical engineering lab.

Twelve’s core technology is a suitcase-sized electrochemical reactor that uses a proprietary catalyst to transform CO₂ into fuel using water and electricity. Their idea is to line up stacks of these reactors next to an airborne stream of carbon dioxide being emitted from cement, steel, or other industrial facilities, then turn it into hydrocarbon fuel. “You just combine as many of those modules together as you need to get to whatever jet fuel production capacity is required for a particular site,” Flanders says.

Flanders says this method of producing fuel could also work by pulling CO₂ right out the atmosphere, something called direct air capture, or DAC. A [study by UC San Diego](#) researchers published earlier this year postulated that DAC might put a dent in greenhouse gases if there’s a global effort to build tens of thousands of these carbon-sucking machines by the end of the century. But they also warned that even with a massive investment in DAC, this would still only remove a fraction of the carbon dioxide needed to meet the [Paris Climate Agreement’s goal](#) of halting global warming at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius over preindustrial levels.

This method might be a good option a decade from now, says Steve Csonka, executive director of the Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative, a public-private partnership between the federal government and the aviation industry. But companies like Twelve aren’t far enough along in the commercialization curve to make the quantities needed by the airline industry. Direct air capture for fuel “is not ready for prime time yet,” says Csonka. “They will be at some point in the future. And if and when we do get those perfected, that basically obviates the need for terrestrial-based feedstocks.”

Until then, airlines will continue to look for new sources of SAF as new manufacturing plants come online. Later this year, United expects to fly the first passenger flight using 100 percent SAF from Chicago to Washington, D.C. Purchasing these new green fuels is more expensive for the airline than using conventional fossil fuels, Riley notes. “But it’s important to send a demand signal to make this transition to lower-carbon flying,” she says.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Jury: minimum wage immigrant detainees
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/immigrant-detainees-at-tacoma-facility-are-owed-minimum-wage-federal-jury-determines/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — A federal jury has determined that The GEO Group must pay minimum wage — rather than \$1 a day — to immigration detainees who perform tasks like cooking and cleaning at its for-profit detention center in Washington state.</p> <p>The verdict came Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Tacoma in a second trial over the issue. The first trial ended in June with a deadlocked jury.</p> <p>“This multi-billion dollar corporation illegally exploited the people it detains to line its own pockets,” Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson said in an emailed statement. “Today’s victory sends a clear message: Washington will not tolerate corporations that get rich violating the rights of the people.”</p>

The jury will now consider how much the immigrant detainees who worked at the facility are owed — an amount expected to run into the millions — and U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan on his own will determine what The GEO Group must pay Washington for its claim that the company unjustly enriched itself.

Ferguson said he would put any money awarded to the state into a fund to benefit the detainees as well as area residents who may have been deprived of jobs because GEO used the detainees to perform the work.

Ferguson, a Democrat, sued the Florida-based GEO Group in 2017, saying the company had unjustly profited by running the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma — now known as the Northwest ICE Processing Center — on the backs of captive workers.

A separate lawsuit filed on behalf of detainees was also filed that year, seeking back pay. The judge, who rejected several attempts by GEO to dismiss the lawsuits, consolidated the cases for trial.

GEO did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment but is expected to appeal.

GEO maintained that the detainees were not employees under the Washington Minimum Wage Act. Even if they were, the company said, it would be unlawfully discriminatory for Washington to require GEO to pay them minimum wage — now \$13.69 an hour — when the state doesn't pay minimum wage to inmates who work at its own prisons or other detention facilities.

The definition of “employee” in Washington’s minimum wage law is broad — it includes anyone who is permitted to work by an employer, without regard to immigration or legal work status. The law says residents of “a state, county, or municipal” detention facility are not entitled to minimum wage for work they perform.

The detention center didn't fit that exemption because it's a private, for-profit facility, not a “state, county or municipal” one, attorneys for the state and for the detainees argued.

The Northwest detention center houses people who are in custody while the federal government seeks to deport them or reviews their immigration status. It can hold up to 1,575 detainees, making it one of the nation's largest immigration jails, though the population has been drastically reduced during the pandemic.

During the first trial, GEO acknowledged it could pay detainees more if it wanted. In 2018, the company made \$18.6 million in profits from the facility; it would have cost \$3.4 million to pay the minimum wage to detainees.

Washington appears to be the only state suing a private detention contractor for not paying minimum wage to immigration detainees. But similar lawsuits have been brought on behalf of immigration detainees in other states, including New Mexico, Colorado and California, seeking to force GEO and another major private detention company, CoreCivic, to pay minimum wage to detainees there.

A federal judge rejected the lawsuit brought by former detainees of CoreCivic's Cibola detention center in New Mexico — a decision upheld by a federal appeals court panel in March.

“Persons in custodial detention — such as appellants — are not in an employer-employee relationship but in a detainer-detainee relationship,” the panel wrote.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 DOH: 719,500 cases, 8554 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article255341256.html
GIST	The Washington state Department of Health reported 1,609 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday and 74 deaths since Monday.

As of Wednesday, statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 719,500 and 8,554 deaths. The case total includes 84,172 infections listed as probable. Death data is considered complete only through Oct. 9. DOH revises previous case and death counts daily.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Limits: authority public health emergencies
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211027-more-states-passing-laws-limiting-authority-to-respond-to-public-health-emergencies
GIST	<p>New data just released by the Temple University Center for Public Health Law Research on LawAtlas.org capture details of an emerging effort by states to limit executive authority to act in response to public health emergencies.</p> <p>Legislators in nearly all US states (46) have introduced bills in 2021 to limit governors' or health officials' authority during the COVID-19 pandemic or other emergencies. According to the data, between 1 January 2021 and 17 June 2021, eleven of these bills were enacted into law and became effective.</p> <p>"Laws that restrict the authority of governors and health agencies to act in times of emergency could significantly impact public health by limiting their ability to take actions necessary to respond to or mitigate the crisis," said Katie Moran-McCabe, special projects manager at the Center for Public Health Law Research and lead researcher on this project.</p> <p>States have taken a variety of approaches to curbing public health authority. As of June 17, 2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Eleven states have a law in effect that was passed since January 1, 2021, that limits state executive authority regarding public health orders.· Nine states limited both the then-governor's authority and the authority of a state agency or official, with all those states limiting the scope of at least one type of order.· Five states limited the governor's authority, the authority of a state agency or official, and the authority of a local agency or official. <p>Some laws limit the duration of a state of emergency or limit emergency orders to a specific number of days (as in Arkansas for example). Others require approval of state health officer actions by an elected official (as in North Dakota) or prohibit the governor or health officials from requiring vaccination (as in Tennessee).</p> <p>Kansas was the first state in 2021 to pass a law limiting public health emergency orders. Kansas is the only state to allow counties to issue a local order that is less stringent than a governor's order, and that a local order may operate in the county in lieu of the governor's executive order.</p> <p>Utah is the only state that limited both state and local health officials in all of the following areas: restricting the ability to issue emergency orders, limiting the duration of emergency orders, restricting the scope of emergency orders, and establishing that emergency orders may be terminated by legislature or another entity.</p> <p>The data were produced using a novel legal mapping technique, sentinel surveillance of emerging laws and policies, developed by the Center for Public Health Law Research, to track laws faster so researchers may more quickly evaluate the impact of these laws and policies on health, well-being and equity.</p> <p>"The sentinel surveillance of emerging laws and policies process is an advancement in our ability to track emerging laws rapidly so we may better understand the impacts these laws are having," said Moran-McCabe. "Our concern with these laws is that they may greatly hobble state and local officials' ability to respond to an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic in a swift and flexible way. Evaluation will help us better understand that impact."</p>

	Funding for the data and the development of the sentinel surveillance of emerging laws and policies process was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and research for the dataset was provided by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Climate 'chain reactions' feared
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211027-climate-chain-reactions-feared
GIST	<p>Climate hazards such as extreme heat, drought and storms could trigger “cascading impacts” that may be felt around the world within the next decade, warns a study released ahead of the UN climate summit, COP26.</p> <p>Increasingly frequent extreme weather events could lead to more food insecurity, displacement of people, and conflict within vulnerable countries by 2030, with knock-on effects for whole regions and the global economy, according to the report by UK-based policy institute Chatham House.</p> <p>The ten “hazard-impact pathways” of greatest near-term concern all relate to Africa or Asia, the report says, referring to the chain of impacts triggered by climate-related events.</p> <p>However, the repercussions of these hazards may be far-reaching, it suggests.</p> <p>The research drew on the views of more than 200 climate scientists and other specialists to assess which immediate climate hazards and impacts should most concern decision-makers in the coming decade.</p> <p>“One of the really concerning things that the research highlighted was that [climate change] impacts aren’t confined to the vulnerable place where they happen,” said Ruth Townend, a research fellow with the environment and society programme at Chatham House and co-author of the report, What near-term climate impacts should worry us the most?</p> <p>“But the vulnerability of the place where they happen means impacts are bigger than they might otherwise be.</p> <p>“They then cascade and have knock-on impacts and sort of chain reactions ... that are global in their nature, or at least cover large regions.”</p> <p>Adaptation finance</p> <p>Researchers say the findings, released ahead of COP26 in Glasgow (31 October-12 November), show that it is in the interests of wealthy nations to finance climate adaptation in the most at-risk regions, where action is urgently needed to address socioeconomic vulnerabilities to climate impacts.</p> <p>Wealthy nations have so far failed to deliver on pledges made at the 2009 climate conference in Copenhagen of at least US\$100 billion a year in climate finance to support developing nations in tackling climate change.</p> <p>“With COP26 coming up, all eyes are focused on ... what can be achieved, particularly in terms of cutting emissions, but one of the key findings of the report is that ... in the near-term one of the most important things is addressing issues of adaptation,” said Townend.</p> <p>“If we don’t act in the 2020s to help vulnerable countries cope with the climate change that is already happening, and will continue to happen, then we’re going to incur wildly spiralling costs in terms of dealing with those disasters in the near future.”</p> <p>Concerns highlighted by the climate scientists and other specialists included heightened food insecurity in South and South-East Asia, and Australasia, as well as reduced food security globally arising from multiple climate hazards leading to “breadbasket failures”.</p>

“You have these key breadbasket regions which export grain to other areas and they play this really important role of stabilising food supply,” said Townend. “So, if your harvest fails, you’re able to buy in grain from outside and that means people don’t go hungry and the impacts are confined, but ... if those breadbasket regions get hit, that safety net is taken away from the whole region and that can increase global food prices.”

Loss and damage

Daniel Quiggin, senior research fellow at Chatham House and lead author of the report, said: “Lack of resilience in the agricultural sector, as well as widespread poverty and inequality in developing nations, most notably in Africa, will exacerbate the impacts of climate change and drive cascading effects across borders.

“Without more aid for adaptation and poverty reduction, food insecurity due to extreme heat, drought, storm damage and multiple crop failures could result in political instability and conflict and drive increased migration to Southern Europe.”

The paper calls for the development of a comprehensive climate risk register that charts the communities most vulnerable to climate hazards, the potential cascading risks, and what can be done to increase resilience.

“The key thing that we’re saying in this report is that by addressing those issues of vulnerability, we can actually prevent really appalling climate disasters from occurring in this decade,” added Townend.

Ritu Bharadwaj, climate governance and finance senior researcher at the International Institute for Environment and Development, said finance for climate ‘loss and damage’ would be one of the key issues to address at COP26. “It is happening now and vulnerable countries and communities around the world are losing their lives, their livelihoods, their homes — they’re getting displaced,” she [told a SciDev.Net debate](#) last week, adding: “These issues will only escalate as climate change impacts get worse.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 BLM demands Pierce Co. sheriff resign
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/blm-demands-resignation-white-sheriff-charged-lying-black-news-carrier-rcna3950
GIST	<p>A Black Lives Matter chapter in Washington state demanded that a white county sheriff resign after he was charged with falsely claiming that a Black newspaper carrier had threatened to kill him.</p> <p>Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer is charged with one count of false reporting and one count of making a false or misleading statement to a public servant, according to charging documents from state Attorney General Robert Ferguson’s office. The misdemeanor charges stem from an incident on Jan. 27, when Troyer followed Sedrick Altheimer along his newspaper route and called 911 claiming that Altheimer had threatened to kill him.</p> <p>News of the incident prompted the Washington BLM Alliance to file a complaint with the U.S. Justice Department, meet with officials at the Seattle FBI field office and, last week, call for Troyer’s resignation.</p> <p>Sakara Remmu, the lead strategist for the alliance, said the group plans to request that Troyer be added to the county’s “Brady list” of law enforcement officers whose credibility has been questioned because of misconduct, criminal convictions, untruthfulness and similar acts. Such lists are maintained by local prosecutors and referred to in cases involving law enforcement officers.</p>

“What he did was malicious,” Remmu said. “It’s clear: This sheriff was trying to get an innocent man killed. This is basically a case of swatting, where you are intentionally calling the police and lying, saying that your life is under threat so that the police respond ready to use excessive or deadly force.”

An investigation by former U.S. Attorney Brian Moran, commissioned by the Pierce County Council, found that Troyer violated several Pierce County Sheriff’s Department policies in the encounter and that “a reasonable person could conclude that Sheriff Troyer exhibited an improper bias in his confrontation with Mr. Alzheimer.” The [48-page report](#) was released Tuesday.

Alzheimer was delivering newspapers along his usual route in Tacoma around 2 a.m. when he noticed Troyer’s personal vehicle, a white Chevrolet Tahoe, following him to several stops, according to Alzheimer’s federal lawsuit against Troyer and the county. Alzheimer eventually approached Troyer’s vehicle near North 27th Street and Deidra Circle and asked whether he was a police officer, but Troyer, who was off duty, didn’t respond or identify himself as a law enforcement officer, the suit states.

Troyer then asked Alzheimer what he was doing and whether he knew where he was before calling him a thief and a “porch pirate,” according to the charging documents. Alzheimer ignored the questions and walked away, only to hear Troyer say: “Hey, don’t walk away. ... I have four cops coming,” according to the documents.

Troyer is [heard in a 911 call](#) describing Alzheimer to dispatchers as “a thief that has a garage door opener,” adding that Alzheimer was in Troyer’s driveway and had threatened to kill him.

At least 40 officers arrived and swarmed Alzheimer’s car, ordering him to keep his hands on the wheel.

Officers told Alzheimer that Troyer had claimed that Alzheimer had threatened to kill him.

“At the scene, he says: ‘He’s lying! He’s lying!’” said Alzheimer’s attorney, Vonda Sargent. “Sedrick is traumatized. It was definitely a situation where the sheriff set up a scenario that could have ended in Sedrick’s demise.”

The responding officers confirmed that Alzheimer was a newspaper carrier working on his route and determined that no crime had taken place, according to a police report. When Tacoma officers questioned Troyer, he said Alzheimer had never threatened him, the police report says.

Troyer has since denied having told police that Alzheimer didn’t threaten him, according to his attorney, John Sheeran.

“He didn’t make a false statement,” Sheeran said in a statement, [according to The New York Times](#). “Sheriff Troyer said that night that his life was threatened and he’s maintained that is the case ever since.” Sheeran told [The Washington Post](#) this year that Troyer began following Alzheimer before he knew he was Black and held that Alzheimer had threatened Troyer but that Troyer decided not to pursue charges.

Sheeran didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

Troyer, who faces nearly a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine if he is convicted, has said the charges are “a blatant and politically motivated anti-cop hit job” by Ferguson, the state attorney general, according to [The Seattle Times](#).

Sargent, Alzheimer’s attorney, said her client was “surprised” and “pleased” when he learned that Troyer had been charged with lying, which she said she also believed was appropriate.

“If Troyer had any ounce of decency ... he would resign,” Sargent said. “He can’t be both the defender of truth and justice while engaging in criminal activity. I don’t expect the police to condemn his actions. I expect them to do exactly what they’re doing, and that’s to hold rank.”

	<p>Alzheimer filed a tort claim against Pierce County in June seeking at least \$5 million in damages. And he filed the federal lawsuit late last month seeking damages for trauma and emotional distress, as well as punitive damages and legal fees.</p> <p>The incident occurred just months after hundreds of protests in cities across the country following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. In the year since that summer of protest, Washington legislators have passed laws making it easier to revoke or suspend an officer's license because of misconduct, requiring police to intervene when fellow officers use excessive force and banning no-knock warrants and chokeholds, among others.</p> <p>Remmu, of the BLM Alliance, said that the laws are a noble start but that there's still a long way to go to "actual change."</p> <p>"Change is a process, and you have to have more than 'wokeness,'" Remmu said. "Once you pass laws, you then have to make sure they are implemented, upheld, then you have to defend them so they aren't changed in the future. Any time the pendulum swings toward progress in this country, it violently swings back to resistance."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Australia fighting fire with fire
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/10/27/australia-climate-change-fires/
GIST	<p>SYDNEY — As flames spread up the hill toward million-dollar homes, the firefighters scrambled to keep pace.</p> <p>"It's starting to move up the trees!" shouted Jason King as Steve Zieba raced ahead with a hose, slipping on the steep incline before aiming his nozzle at a burning eucalyptus trunk. On the cliffside above them, another crew hauled a water line up sheer rocks and through heavy smoke to replace a hose melted by the blaze.</p> <p>Even as they battled the flames, the firefighters also fed them, using metal canisters called drip torches to ignite the undergrowth. Two helicopters hovered overhead: one dropping water, the other, incendiary pellets.</p> <p>For decades, Australian firefighters have tried to peg back bush fires by preempting them. Like soldiers picking the time and terrain for an attack, yellow-clad "firies" routinely burn swaths of forest and scrubland from September to November, before the summer brings soaring temperatures, arid winds and lightning strikes.</p> <p>These hazard reduction burns — also known as controlled or prescribed burns — are aimed at reducing the likelihood of a serious wildfire, or at least slowing one so firefighters have a fighting chance.</p> <p>But in this chess game with Mother Nature, humans have put themselves at a disadvantage.</p> <p>Climate change has made Australia's major fires fiercer and more frequent, scientists say. While the conservative government this week bowed to pressure and agreed to go carbon-neutral by 2050, experts warn catastrophes like the Black Summer fires two years ago that killed 34 people and destroyed nearly 2,500 homes could become regular occurrences.</p> <p>Hazard reduction is one of the few tools firefighters have to respond. Yet, climate change is altering that, too, as expanding fire seasons narrow the window for controlled burns.</p> <p>"Those opportunities are few and far between," said Ben Shepherd from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (RFS), one of the agencies conducting the prescribed burn in Sydney's north earlier this month. "The question now with climate change is how long the fire season will last."</p>

As another season looms, some former chiefs fear climate change is making hazard reduction burns obsolete.

“We now have bush fires that are like lava flows,” said Neil Bibby, the former head of Victoria’s Country Fire Authority. “There is going to be a lot of pain, and that pain includes not being able to do what you used to do back in the 1990s. Try doing it in the 2020s or 2030s and you’ve got no hope.”

‘Fighting a losing battle’

On the morning of the burn, the firefighters spread out around the [scribbly gum](#) trees and sandstone heath of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. The 100 or so people were mostly unpaid volunteers: cops and supermarket clerks, groundskeepers and financial traders, plumbers and town planners.

Some had fought the last wildfire to tear through this area 27 years earlier. Others, like Zieba, had joined since the Black Summer blazes, when the RFS was flooded with more than 8,000 applications. Around half of them had completed training, bringing the force to more than 76,000 people, the largest volunteer firefighting organization in the world.

“I got tired of sitting in the office all the time,” said Zieba, a 40-year-old IT consultant concerned about climate change.

During the Black Summer fires, Prime Minister Scott Morrison [tried to deflect criticism](#) by quipping, “I don’t hold a hose, mate.” Two years later, he is again under pressure over his management of an even bigger crisis.

Australia isn’t just on the front lines of climate change. As one of the highest per capita carbon emitters, it is also at the center of the debate over what needs to be done. Yet, [until this week](#), ahead of the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, it had not committed to a 2050 net zero emissions target.

The vast majority of Australians want to see more action on climate change, polls show. And so do many of the men and women actually holding the hose, even if they are reluctant to say so.

“We live in the driest [inhabited] continent on earth, and we’re just making it drier,” said Jeff Hodder, a retired IT worker, as he kept the fire away from power lines. Asked if climate change was the cause, Hodder said he couldn’t answer while in uniform, then went ahead and said yes.

James Daly said he just tried to “put the wet stuff on the red stuff” and leave the climate change discussion to others, though he said global warming couldn’t be ignored.

“I try to balance out being a capitalist pig with helping people,” joked the 44-year-old financial worker.

The RFS and other Australian firefighting agencies now say climate change is increasing the frequency and ferocity of bush fires. But it has mostly fallen to retired fire chiefs to sound the alarm.

In 2019, months before the Black Summer fires, Bibby and two dozen other former chiefs wrote to the prime minister twice to ask for a meeting only to be rebuffed. By December, when Morrison’s office reached out, there were major fires in almost every state.

“I don’t think you can deny it in Australia,” said Greg Mullins, the former chief of Fire and Rescue NSW. “The fires are different now. Extreme weather is in people’s faces.”

Mullins recalls the time as a teenager when he was caught in a blaze and had to huddle in a wheel rut as the flames moved over him. The air was so hot he passed out. He woke up — with blisters on his neck and holes burned in his overalls — when another firefighter kicked him, fearing Mullins was dead.

He retired in 2017 but still volunteers with the RFS.

“Things are burning that never burned before,” he said, citing recent fires in the rainforests of Tasmania and Queensland. “We are fighting a losing battle.”

Hazard reduction burns are still essential, he said, but are becoming “less and less effective.”

Bibby goes further, arguing climate change has turned controlled burns into mere training exercises — something Shepherd from the RFS strenuously denied. But the former chiefs agree that if the world doesn’t act to limit warming, Australia’s fires may soon be unstoppable.

“I can see medium-sized towns being obliterated,” Bibby said. “It’s already happening.”

Managing risk

The flames at incendiary point seven were spreading nicely when the firefighters saw a shape moving in the smoke. Suddenly, a mountain biker clad in Lycra came out of the bush.

“Is there anyone else in there?” Jarryd Barton shouted at the biker, who replied no.

“Bloody hell,” the firefighter said, laughing and shaking his head.

The biker wasn’t the only thing to emerge as the blaze got going. Within minutes, thousands of insects began to crawl away from the flames. A millipede wriggled across the road as spiders the size of silver dollars crept up trees, firefighters’ tools and, on several occasions, a reporter.

As kookaburras braved the smoke to enjoy the sudden feast, skinks crawled through the ashes and bushy-tailed marsupials scampered out of the scrub and onto manicured lawns. At one point, Hodder guided a toad to safety.

Weeks of preparation go into each hazard reduction burn, including environmental assessments, Shepherd said. For the Oct. 9 burn, the RFS and NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service had prepared a 20-page plan, including control lines and escape routes. Locals had given their consent. Burns are canceled when strong winds threaten to spread embers.

But hazard reduction burns can go wrong, as one did last year, [scorching North Head](#) on Sydney Harbor.

As the firefighters worked, Scott Small watched from the edge of his yard. The 57-year-old businessman had spent more than a week during the Black Summer fires keeping flames away from another property. He had a four-wheeler with a water tank on the back, in case things took a bad turn. But Small didn’t believe climate change was affecting the fires.

“It’s the bush,” he said. “At times, it’s just going to burn.”

On the other side of the burn, atop the cliffs where Zieba was toiling, David Martin felt the same way. As he and his partner drank mojitos on their deck and watched smoke drift over the water, the 66-year-old semi-retired insurance executive said the issue wasn’t climate change but the amount of kindling, which he trusted the hazard reduction burn to address.

Martin knew the chance of a wildfire was higher here, next to the national park.

“I accepted the risk, considering what I have to look at when I get up in the morning,” he said, gesturing at the view.

The operation was over by dusk. Most of the 135 acres had burned, leaving bare, silent choirs of charred branches where birds had sung hours earlier.

The birds would return.

	One way or another, so would the fire.
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	10/27 Judge denies NYPD union to halt mandate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/10/28/new-york-city-vaccine-mandate-judge/
GIST	<p>A judge on Wednesday denied a request from a New York City police union to temporarily halt Mayor Bill De Blasio's (D) order requiring all municipal employees, including law enforcement officials, to receive at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine by later this week or face unpaid leave.</p> <p>Richmond County Supreme Court Judge Lizette Colon ruled that De Blasio's mandate – which the Police Benevolent Association is seeking to overturn – can proceed, reportedly citing a previous state appellate ruling that upheld a vaccine mandate for measles.</p> <p>Patrick J. Lynch, president of the police union that argues De Blasio's mandate doesn't provide sufficient religious exemptions, said in a statement on Wednesday that the mandate will "inevitably result" in fewer cops available to protect the city's streets next month.</p> <p>"New Yorkers should know who to blame for any shortfall in city services: Mayor Bill de Blasio," he said.</p> <p>Union members have also expressed frustration with the city's decision to stop giving municipal employees the option to provide negative test results, instead of getting vaccinated.</p> <p>The mandate applies to around 160,500 individuals, though 71 percent of them had already received at least one shot of a vaccine, the city said last week. City officials must have at least one dose by 5 p.m. Friday, they said. The mandate takes effect on the following Monday.</p> <p>Police departments are facing an infection crisis, as departments around the country seeking to mandate vaccines clash with police unions and officers who oppose the requirements. Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Seattle, are some of the cities that have seen clashes between law enforcement officers and municipal leaders over vaccine mandates.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Anthony S. Fauci, the United States' top infectious-disease expert, urged police officers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus — saying the resistance "doesn't make any sense" as "more police officers die of covid than they do in other causes of death."</p> <p>Law enforcement officers are considered to be at higher risk because they are exposed to more people in the line of duty. Around 500 police officers have died of covid-19 during the pandemic. The disease caused by the coronavirus was the leading cause of death for officers in 2020 and 2021, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page.</p> <p>New York City's police department employs around 36,000 officers and 19,000 civilians. Around 75 percent of the police department are vaccinated, tweeted Police Commissioner Dermot Shea on Wednesday.</p> <p>Up to 45 percent of New York City firefighters could remain unvaccinated, said Andrew Ansbro, the president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association, a union representing the city's firefighters, during an interview on Fox this week.</p> <p>In remarks published by the New York Post on Wednesday, Ansbro said he was concerned that if too many firefighters were forced off their jobs, response times could increase, resulting in more deaths in the city. The fire department expects a fifth of its fire companies and ambulances to be offline due to the vaccine mandate, the Associated Press reported.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Historic rain, snow refreshes California
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/10/27/california-record-rain-reservoirs-drought/
GIST	<p>Between historic drought and a lively fire season, California has experienced a troublesome year. Now, the state may have received the first sign of major relief: 8 trillion gallons of rain.</p> <p>Like an epic fire hose, a long, narrow band of water vapor located in the lower atmosphere — known as an atmospheric river — doused California with record-setting rains Sunday and Monday. The event unloaded upward of 12 inches of rain on the northern Sierras, almost a quarter of the annual average precipitation for the region.</p> <p>The deluge comes only days after a record-breaking dry spell — what some scientists call precipitation whiplash. Sacramento had its wettest calendar day on record Sunday, just six days after the conclusion of its longest precipitation-free streak observed. Northern California and much of Nevada are experiencing their wettest October in decades.</p> <p>“It is great that we received this much rain early in the season, which helped with wildfires and air quality,” wrote Helen Dahlke, associate professor in Integrated Hydrologic Sciences at the University of California at Davis, in an email. “The more these precipitation events are spread out over the rainy season the more chance the rain has to infiltrate and replenish soil moisture storage.”</p> <p>However, the intense rain occurred about a month or so earlier than in recent years. As a result, burned lands had little time to regrow vegetation and were more vulnerable to flooding, erosion and landslides. At least one landslide in the Dixie Fire zone blocked a highway.</p> <p>The precipitation triggered flooding, particularly in coastal areas. The Navarro River reached 21.36 feet, about two feet shy of flood stage. Dahlke said the flooding meant quite a bit of the rain became runoff and flowed out to the ocean before it could seep into the ground.</p> <p>“Longer storms of lower intensity would be better for groundwater recharge since dry soils often have a hard time infiltrating water quickly,” Dahlke said. “But luckily many reservoirs were empty and therefore most of the runoff will be captured in reservoirs.”</p> <p>The storm managed to increase water levels in many reservoirs. Millerton Lake and Lake Perris have both exceeded their historical average for this time of the year, but those proved to be exceptions. On the whole, most are still below the historical average for this time of the year even with the bump.</p> <p>Lake Tahoe received about 61,000 acre-feet of runoff in 48 hours, rising about six inches above the rim since Sunday. Last week, water levels on Lake Tahoe sank to a critical low at an inch below its natural rim. The lake is still about five-and-a-half feet away from capacity.</p> <p>Earlier this summer, water levels at Lake Oroville dropped to such low levels that officials shut down a nearby hydroelectric plant. After Sunday and Monday’s storm, the lake rose 26 feet. The lake is still more than 130 feet below water levels from two years ago.</p> <p>California’s largest reservoir, Lake Shasta, is at 41 percent of its historical average for this time, as of Oct 26.</p> <p>The storm also brought feet of snow to higher elevations. Some locations in the northern Sierras reported more than 30 inches from Saturday to Tuesday: Northstar and Homewood received 36 inches each, Donner Pass received 33 inches, and Palisades Tahoe received 29 inches. Mammoth Mountain Ski resort, which opens Friday, also received two feet of snow and will be the first major ski resort in the area to open for the season.</p> <p>The snow will probably not last through the winter, Dahlke said. Warm air temperatures and residual summer heat stored in the soils are likely to melt the snow in upcoming weeks. However, the snowmelt could seep into the soil and replenish some soil moisture lost during the spring and summer.</p>

“This storm also helped immensely with reducing potential drought effects to natural vegetation,” Dahlke said. She said the storm occurred before the senescence (deterioration) of most trees, which were able to soak up some of the water and are likely to survive the drought effects.

While this one event helped provide some short-term relief, it won’t fix the moisture deficits accumulated over the past two years. Only about 56 inches of rain fell over the past two years in the northern Sierras, which is around half of the normal precipitation. This year would need to be above average to make up for the recent deficits.

“California will need at least another three storms of similar magnitude (or better 5-7 storms of lesser magnitude) to achieve the long-term average precipitation,” Dahlke said. “Ideally we do need more than the annual average to make up the deficit of the last two years.”

Long-term patterns show more atmospheric rivers could be in store in upcoming months. While the magnitude of those events is unknown, studies show climate change could increase the intensity of atmospheric rivers. One study showed that atmospheric rivers would be about 25 percent wider and longer at our current rate of greenhouse gas emissions.

Duane Waliser, an atmospheric scientist at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said the key would be if these Category 5 atmospheric rivers tended to happen more and more over time, which is not evident yet from the limited observation records. One Category 5 atmospheric river in a time period — akin to one Category 5 hurricane in a given season — is not necessarily alarming, but multiple occurrences could tell a different story.

“If a big event like this happens near the end of the season, particularly a normal or wet one, then the flood hazards are more likely,” Waliser said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Taiwan confirms US military presence
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/taiwan-china-biden-tsai/2021/10/28/89f040a6-3797-11ec-9662-399cfa75efee_story.html
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan — Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen confirmed that American troops have been training the Taiwanese military, as tensions between Beijing and the self-governing island intensify over China’s fears of Taipei’s evolving relationship with Washington.</p> <p>Tsai, who has ruled Taiwan as head of the Democratic Progressive Party since 2016, told CNN in an interview published on Thursday that U.S. military personnel were in Taiwan as part of a training program. She declined to give details of the numbers of soldiers involved.</p> <p>The rare public acknowledgment, which comes after the Wall Street Journal reported that Marines had been in Taiwan for at least a year, drew an angry response from the Chinese state-backed tabloid the Global Times, which accused Tsai of “pushing the mainland to decide to resolve the Taiwan question by force.”</p> <p>The Chinese Communist Party has claimed Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory since 1949 when the Nationalist Kuomintang retreated to the island about 100 miles from the coast of southeastern Fujian province. Beijing regularly threatens to take the island by force if Taiwan’s democratically elected government ever declares legal independence.</p> <p>Beijing’s mistrust of Tsai, whose party historically supported formal independence, has only grown after she won a second term in a landslide victory last year. Tsai maintains that she supports a continuation of the status quo in Taipei’s relationship with Beijing, reflecting her party’s official position since 1999. But Chinese officials accuse her of supporting “separatists.”</p>

Tsai's interview remarks come at an [unusually fraught period](#) even for the typically tense relationship between Taipei and Beijing. Over China's National Day holiday this month, the People's Liberation Army sent a [record number](#) of fighter jets and bombers into Taiwan's air defense identification zone, drawing warnings from the United States.

That same week, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Tsai exchanged dueling speeches laying out their visions for the future of Taiwan. While Xi promised that unification would "definitely be achieved," Tsai marked Taiwan's National Day by [responding](#) that "nobody can force Taiwan to take the path China has laid out for us."

In her interview, Tsai framed the question of protecting Taiwan as one of defending democracy. "If we fail, then that means people that believe in these values would doubt whether these are values that they [should] be fighting for," she told CNN.

By openly emphasizing the strength of Taiwan's ties with the United States, Tsai hopes to deter Beijing from future military action, said Charles Chong-Han Wu, associate professor at the Department of Diplomacy, National Chengchi University. "It sends a signal that Americans are behind supporting us," he said. "The president saying it out loud makes it more strategic and credible."

Wu added that Tsai appeared to be taking advantage of an opportunity to deter Beijing after President Biden last week said that the United States would [come to Taiwan's defense](#) if China attacked. "She wants to tell Beijing, 'Don't act rashly. America really will help us,'" he said.

Many analysts believed Biden misspoke, because his remarks appeared to be at odds with a policy of "strategic ambiguity" which leaves it unclear whether the United States would intervene in a conflict. The White House later clarified that U.S. policy had not changed. Still, Beijing responded with a warning to underestimate its resolve, adding that China has "no room for compromise" over Taiwan.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 CDC adds mood disorders Covid risk factor
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/mental-disorder-cdc-covid-eligibility/2021/10/27/2a45eea0-32ae-11ec-9241-aad8e48f01ff_story.html
GIST	<p>When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention added mood disorders to the list of conditions that put people at high risk for severe covid-19 recently, clinicians were not surprised. The mind-body connection, they say, is long-settled research.</p> <p>But the scientific seal of approval is still critical: It makes millions of people eligible for booster shots based on their mental health diagnosis alone and gives vulnerable groups more reason to protect themselves.</p> <p>"This is a population that is really, really at risk due to the way that covid-19 interacts with the diagnoses," said Lisa Dailey, executive director of the Treatment Advocacy Center. "Until the CDC put this group of disorders on their list, they would not have known that."</p> <p>The CDC on Oct. 14 added "mental health conditions" to a long list of mostly physical conditions that make someone likely to be hospitalized, need a ventilator or die of the coronavirus, including cancer, diabetes and obesity.</p> <p>The change means it is important for people with "mood disorders, including depression, and schizophrenia spectrum disorders" to get vaccinated — with initial doses and boosters — and take preventive measures, such as masking, social distancing and hand-washing, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Public health experts say these precautions are critical for people who are older or have multiple conditions on the list, which is not intended to be comprehensive and has been updated frequently throughout the pandemic.</p>

The addition of mental illness to the high-risk list could put millions of Americans on notice.

In 2019, more than 19 million people — nearly 8 percent of adults in the United States — had at least one episode of depression, and at least half that number were diagnosed with depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, [according to federal data](#).

The numbers have only grown since then, according to research published this month [in the journal Lancet](#). Worldwide, the pandemic triggered 53 million new cases of depression in 2020, a 28 percent increase from the previous year, the research shows.

The statistics underscore the suffering Dana Mueller, director of adult and family medicine at Mary's Center, the D.C. community health clinic, has seen during the pandemic.

Her patients, many of whom are front-line workers, have more anxiety and depression, as well as out-of-control diabetes, hypertension and obesity, and often multiple risk factors at once. Yet 11 months into vaccine availability, Mueller is still giving first doses. That's why, she said, her relationship with her patients — combined with scientific backing — is key.

"They're just waiting to hear it from us. Anything we can say to say, 'This matters and you're at increased risk,' " Mueller said.

Advocates at the local and national level lobbied the CDC for months to consider adding mental illness to the high-risk list, which already included substance use disorders, such as addiction to alcohol, opioids or cocaine.

Two comprehensive meta-analyses published in the Journal of the American Medical Association confirmed that people with serious mental illness are more at risk for severe illness from covid-19.

[One study](#) that analyzed data from seven countries found that individuals with schizophrenia were the second-likeliest group to die of covid-19, after the elderly.

Roger S. McIntyre, scientific advisory board chair at the Chicago-based Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, is one of the researchers behind the [other paper](#), which reviewed 21 studies that included more than 91 million people.

The study found a strong link between preexisting mood disorders and hospitalization and death, even when adjusting for smoking, comorbidities such as heart disease, and insecurity in health care, housing and employment, he said.

"Taken together, we've got reasons to be hypervigilant for people who have depression. They've got to get in front of the queue to get their vaccines," said McIntyre, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto.

Several experts noted that not enough is known about the biology of mental illness and covid-19 to understand why the outcomes are worse when both are present.

Anna Mendez, executive director of the nonprofit Partner for Mental Health in Charlottesville, an affiliate of Mental Health America, got involved when she discovered a local shelter would accept only clients who had a condition on the CDC high-risk list. She had a client whose mood disorder made him ineligible at the time.

"If service providers in our little town are using this list to determine eligibility, it has to be happening elsewhere," she said.

Her organization and 15 others signed a Sept. 22 letter to CDC Director Rochelle Walensky calling for an “immediate and urgent response.”

“Our organizations hope that the CDC will seize this opportunity to demonstrate that individuals with these conditions are not invisible and deserve the consideration afforded to those living with other conditions appropriately identified on the CDC’s list,” they wrote.

Mary Giliberti, executive vice president of policy at Mental Health America, based in Alexandria, said the change could fuel appropriate outreach and community services specifically for people with mood disorders.

“This is very significant because I think it will make a tremendous difference to people who have these mental health conditions, their families and their providers,” she said.

Alexis Aplasca, chief clinical officer and the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, said the [coronavirus](#) hit people suffering with severe mental illness hard, making it the No. 1 cause of death among patients at [state psychiatric hospitals](#) over the past year.

The change could reinforce the need for vaccination, as well as infection prevention training for caregivers, which the state is expanding using federal grant dollars.

“What this tells us is we need to do a little extra work for this population and allocate resources to reach these people,” Aplasca said.

Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, the assistant secretary for mental health and substance abuse in the Department of Health and Human Services, said the change underscores the link between mental and physical health.

“CDC’s recent inclusion of certain mental health conditions that can contribute to the severity of a covid-19 infection reinforces the plight faced by Americans with behavioral health issues, including substance use disorders,” she said in a statement.

But Dailey, the head of the Arlington-based Treatment Advocacy Center, said public health officials may incorrectly think of mental health as separate from physical illness.

“It is a physical illness,” she said. “We really need a top-down approach. We need national leadership on this.”

The same strategies that helped vaccinate large numbers of elderly people and [nursing home residents](#) — pop-up clinics, one-on-one conversations and transportation assistance — will work for people with mood disorders, Dailey said.

“We basically need to figure out where this population is likely to be and address concerns they might have about the vaccine,” she said. “It isn’t rocket science.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 HHS: more harm reduction for drug users
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/10/27/harm-reduction-drugs-fentanyl/
GIST	<p>Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra outlined the Biden administration’s strategy for curbing drug overdoses Wednesday, committing more federal support for harm reduction techniques such as distribution of clean syringes and test strips used to check street drugs for hidden fentanyl.</p> <p>The four-part strategy also includes measures to prevent drug addiction, in part by continuing to reduce the inappropriate prescribing of opioids; expanding medication-based treatment, which research has</p>

shown to be the most effective approach; and improving support for people recovering from substance use disorder.

With the estimated number of U.S. overdose deaths [soaring toward 100,000 per year](#), Becerra said in an interview Tuesday that “we’re changing the way we do this.” He added: “We know what works. We’ve had years of evidence now.”

From 1999 to 2019, an HHS report released Wednesday notes, 840,000 people died of drug overdoses. By some estimates, there have been 20 to 30 times as many nonfatal overdoses.

Biden [campaigns on a major expansion](#) of drug-use prevention, treatment and recovery efforts. Much of what Becerra announced Wednesday, including harm-reduction efforts, was contained in a [statement of priorities](#) for the administration’s first year released in March by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Though some officials oppose it, many experts consider harm reduction a more promising approach than [prosecution of drug users](#) or the many failed campaigns to keep drugs from [coming into the United States](#). But it is also a measure of how dire the overdose crisis has become: Fentanyl has so thoroughly infiltrated the illegal drug supply that users often cannot be sure what they are consuming, and the government must act simply to keep them alive and disease-free.

“We really are seeing something we’ve never seen before,” said Jon Zibbell, a senior public health scientist at the think tank RTI International, who studies street drug use.

Becerra said the federal government would spend more to expand the distribution of naloxone, the antidote to opioid overdoses, although there is a [shortage of the drug currently](#); fund programs in which drug users can exchange used syringes for clean ones, to reduce needle-sharing that transmits infections such as HIV and [hepatitis C](#); and distribute test strips that allow users to determine if the powerful opioid fentanyl has been laced into cocaine, methamphetamine and [counterfeit pills](#).

Asked whether the government would allow [supervised consumption sites](#), the most controversial facet of harm reduction, where people are monitored while using drugs, Becerra said: “When it comes to harm reduction, we are looking for every way to do that. ... We probably will support the efforts of states that are using evidence-based practices and therapies.”

Becerra noted that the decision was outside his “lane,” but as California’s attorney general, he was a [supporter of the facilities](#), where drug users are monitored by staff or volunteers equipped with naloxone and oxygen to respond to overdoses. Some offer referral to treatment and other services to substance abusers.

[Widespread in Canada](#) and Europe, the sites are credited with saving many thousands of lives of people who accidentally overdose; no one has ever died in one of the oldest and best-known supervised sites in Vancouver. But some experts and officials say the facilities encourage drug use and attract drug users to the sites.

Under the Trump administration, the Justice Department went to court and [defeated a nonprofit group’s attempt](#) to open such a site in Philadelphia. Any change in government policy would be a major shift in approach. A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment. The White House did not respond to requests for comment Tuesday.

Jurisdictions including Rhode Island, New York City, Massachusetts and California are preparing to open such sites, hoping the Biden administration will refrain from cracking down as the drug epidemic grows more critical.

“We’re looking for innovative ways to address” the drug epidemic, said Alex Kral, an epidemiologist with RTI International. If the federal government is finally indicating support for these sites, “we can finally see if they are equally helpful in the U.S. as they are around the world.”

The HHS plan also calls for expanding the number of doctors who can prescribe the treatment drug [buprenorphine](#) by surmounting rules that require hours of training for those caregivers. It calls for reducing the stigma surrounding substance-use disorder that keeps people from seeking treatment. Polls show that many Americans still consider addiction a personal failing or weakness rather than a disease. And the plan acknowledges the need to maximize “health equity for disproportionately affected populations” as “an essential component of each priority area, objective, and activity.”

Overall, the plan “does the three things you have to do to reverse an addiction epidemic: prevent people from developing the disorder, treat those who have it, and keep those you can’t treat alive,” Keith Humphreys, a Stanford University psychiatry professor who worked as a drug policy expert in the Obama White House, said in an email.

“We can’t let the trauma of covid let us forget that we will likely lose 100,000 of our fellow citizens to drug overdose,” he wrote. “Every time I say or read that number, it shocks me again.”

Zibbell was less encouraged. “Everything in there is kind of stuff we’re already doing,” he said. “I see nothing in there that’s really evolving to the nature of the crisis.”

In a statement, former congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.) described the plan as “a step in the right direction,” but he called for HHS to more aggressively enforce mental health and addiction-parity laws.

“Unfortunately, HHS has historically not done enough to ensure that Medicaid managed care and ACA marketplace plans under its jurisdiction are complying with the [federal Mental Health] Parity Act, which requires health plans to cover treatment for mental health and substance use disorders no more restrictively than treatment for illnesses of the body, such as diabetes and cancer,” said Kennedy, who struggled with substance use disorder himself.

But Becerra said the Biden administration is devoting more resources to the crisis than ever before. “We’re not going to wait,” he said. “And there’s going to be some friction. We’ll take some heat. But at the end of the day, there will be some loved ones still alive.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/26 Run out storm names for hurricane season?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/10/26/atlantic-hurricane-season-names-2021/
GIST	<p>As September ended, it seemed like a lock that the Atlantic hurricane season would run out of storm names for the only the third time in its history. But since Oct. 6, storm activity has shut down with not a single named system since.</p> <p>With just over a month left in hurricane season, it’s rather unclear whether the list of names will finally be exhausted for a second straight year.</p> <p>The nor’easter currently lashing the Northeast United States is a possible candidate to become Wanda, the 21st and final name on 2021’s list. The National Hurricane Center says it has a 40 percent chance of transforming into a tropical or subtropical entity as it interacts with the warm waters of the Gulf Stream.</p> <p>Even if the nor’easter isn’t named, there’s still a chance that a tropical storm or hurricane forms in November which, on average, produces one named storm.</p> <p>Whether Wanda forms will determine if 2020 and 2021 make history as the first back-to-back years to exhaust the list of Atlantic storm names. 2021 would also become only the third year on record to do so.</p>

A brief history of named storms

To understand how we got here, it's helpful to understand how storms are named.

The Hurricane Center assigns names alphabetically to tropical systems as soon as their wind speed increases beyond the 39 mph threshold necessary to become a tropical storm. This means the first storm of the year is named with an A, the second named with a B, etc. On average, there are approximately [14 such named storms a year](#), so the Hurricane Center only has to use letters "A" through "N" during a normal season.

The World Meteorological Organization maintains [six alphabetic lists of 21 names](#) that rotate through a six-year cycle. Names are not assigned to the letters Q, U, X, Y and Z due to the paucity of choices. Storms that are harmful to life and property are retired from the list and replaced.

Through the early 2000s, the lists of 21 names were sufficient to capture the observed number of storms. Only twice, in 1969 and 1995, were there more than 15 named storms; neither season reached 20.

But in 2005, an astonishing 27 tropical storms and hurricanes formed, blowing through the conventional name list. After Wilma became the season's 21st storm in October of that year, it became clear that a supplemental list of names was necessary. It was agreed upon that the Greek alphabet would supply auxiliary names. On Oct. 22, 2005, the Hurricane Center declared that Tropical Storm Alpha had formed.

A season so extraordinarily active would not remain in lone company for long, though. 2020 managed to top 1995's count of 27 named storms, with a 30-storm run that made it as far into the Greek alphabet as Iota.

The 2020 hurricane season, however, showed why naming storms after Greek letters was problematic. What if you had to retire a Greek-letter-named storm? Eta and Zeta, which ravaged Nicaragua and Louisiana, both merited replacement under World Meteorological Organization policy.

Responding to this concern, the World Meteorological Organization decided it would stop using Greek letters if the conventional list of 21 names was exhausted. Instead, starting this year, it has developed [a new supplementary name list](#). Storms on this additional list can be retired and replaced if they result in devastation.

2021's race to 21-named storms

Through the end of September, the Atlantic was actually ahead of 2005's pace in working through the list of names. But it has since fallen into third place.

There are several atmospheric factors contributing to a season that has already secured a bronze medal for named storm occurrence. A multiyear climate oscillation known as La Niña is showering the basin with conditions supportive for tropical cyclone development, and global warming is almost certainly increasing the oceanic heat content that storms use to form and strengthen.

However, just because 2021 may become only the third season to overshoot the naming list does not mean this is the third most supportive hurricane environment in known meteorological history. Nonatmospheric factors probably also play a role.

Brian McNoldy, senior research associate at the University of Miami and hurricane expert for Capital Weather Gang, notes that a significant factor driving the increase in named storm occurrence could be improvements in weather satellite technology.

"Satellites have evolved and improved drastically over the past 55 years or so since they started providing us with data," McNoldy said. "We are bound to catch more 'marginal' storms now than decades ago."

	<p>This greater storm detection can explain some of the increase in the number of names, especially the short-lived, weak storms that do not impact land. The tropical Atlantic has been home to many of these so-called “shorties” this year.</p> <p>Named storm count can still be a useful metric, though, as long as such nuances are considered, McNoldy said. And it is important to note that the abundance of shorties could well have roots in human-caused climate change, too.</p> <p>“A warmer ocean could mean that what would have been unfavorable for storm development decades ago could now be marginally favorable, so we start seeing these systems sneak in where they were absent before,” McNoldy said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/28 World fails to change avoid climate crisis
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/28/world-failing-make-changes-avoid-climate-breakdown-report
GIST	<p>Every corner of society is failing to take the “transformational change” needed to avert the most disastrous consequences of the climate crisis, with trends either too slow or in some cases even regressing, according to a major new global analysis.</p> <p>Across 40 different areas spanning the power sector, heavy industry, agriculture, transportation, finance and technology, not one is changing quickly enough to avoid 1.5C in global heating beyond pre-industrial times, a critical target of the Paris climate agreement, according to the new Systems Change Lab report.</p> <p>The dangerously sluggish pace of decarbonization, made plain just days before the start of crucial UN climate talks in Scotland, further highlights how the world is badly off track in its attempts to curb climate breakdown.</p> <p>Atmospheric levels of planet-heating gases hit a new record high last year, and the UN has warned the amount of fossil fuel extraction planned by countries “vastly exceeds” the limit needed to keep below the 1.5C threshold.</p> <p>“We need to pull out the stops in every sector, to transform our power generation, the diets we have, how we manage land and more, all simultaneously,” said Kelly Levin, chief of science at the Bezos Earth Fund, one of the report’s co-authors. “We need transformational change and it’s very clear the trends aren’t moving fast enough.”</p> <p>From renewable electricity generation to meat consumption to public financing for fossil fuels, the report found that no indicator was showing the required progress to cut emissions in half this decade before eliminating greenhouse gases completely by 2050, which would give the world a chance to keep below 1.5C.</p> <p>Coal needs to be phased out five times faster than it is now, according to the analysis, while the pace of reforestation needs to be three times faster. Coastal wetlands need to be restored nearly three times faster, climate finance needs to grow 13 times faster and the energy intensity of buildings needs to drop at a rate almost three times faster than now.</p> <p>In wealthy countries across Europe and North America, the consumption of beef needs to reduce 1.5 times faster than it is now. In these countries with high meat consumption and plentiful alternatives, cutting back to the equivalent of one and a half burgers per person a week would significantly reduce demand for land and greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>There are some glimmers of promise: the global share of electricity generated from solar and wind has grown at 15% annually over the past five years and renewables have become the most cost-effective</p>

replacement for coal in most places. Electric vehicle adoption is on the rise, reaching more than 4% of worldwide car sales last year.

The report also found there was a good chance, given proper support, of “exponential” progress in technology such as the direct removal of carbon dioxide from the air, which scientists have said will probably have to be deployed on a grand scale to reduce worsening climate disasters. But overall the picture is of a world moving too slowly to confront the climate crisis.

“While things are heading in the right direction in some areas, we are moving too slowly to avoid 1.5C,” said Sophie Boehm, a climate researcher at World Resources Institute and report co-author. “If that continues, we will fall woefully short of the goals to avoid disastrous climate change. It’s very worrying we are not on track for any of these target areas.”

While progress is lagging in most places, three areas in particular – cement production, steel making and efforts to place a fee on carbon emissions – are stagnating, the report found. A further three – emissions from agriculture, the share of trips made by cars and the deforestation rate – are moving in the wrong direction.

“We need complete u-turns from these areas,” said Levin. “With climate change you can’t just head in the right direction, you need to do it at pace. Without that, we will reach disastrous tipping points.”

There is little optimism that countries will make the required commitments to salvage this situation at the Glasgow talks, known as Cop26, with Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, [admitting](#) it is “touch and go” whether the required action will be taken. John Kerry, who is Joe Biden’s climate envoy, has said there will likely be “gaps” in emissions-cutting plans put forward by governments.

Should the world breach 1.5C in global heating, [the planet will be hit by an increasing frequency](#) of deadly heatwaves, ruinous storms, disastrous flooding and crop failures, wiping trillions of dollars from economic activity and forcing the displacement of millions of people. António Guterres, secretary general of the UN, has warned the world is risking a “hellish future” through its lack of urgency to confront the crisis.

“We have the technology for the majority of these areas to decarbonize,” said Bill Hare, chief executive of Climate Analytics, an organization that provided input to the new report. “What we need is political will, and for governments to catch up with the opportunity this transition will bring for their economies.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 China bold climate goals collide w/reality
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-ambitious-climate-goals-collide-with-reality-imperiling-global-efforts-11635346919?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>China, the world’s largest greenhouse-gas polluter, is heading to Glasgow climate talks next week with a bold agenda: For the first time, it promises to take major steps to wean itself off fossil fuels, committing to net-zero emissions before 2060.</p> <p>But in the coming decade, the country says, its carbon emissions will continue to rise, peaking sometime before 2030.</p> <p>China’s climate pledges are bumping up against realities on the ground. The world’s No. 2 economy is so large and still growing so quickly that it might not be technically possible, let alone politically palatable, for the country’s leaders to move faster.</p> <p>Earlier this year, Beijing pushed a range of measures to discourage the use of coal and control emissions. In late August, China’s top climate and energy official, Vice Premier Han Zheng, convened an online meeting of provincial leaders in Beijing, where he admonished them to “resolutely curb the blind development” of high-emissions projects like coal plants.</p>

A month later, [amid escalating coal shortages and power outages](#), Mr. Han told leaders of state-owned energy companies that although those curbs were still important, the priority was to get coal-power generators cranking again. “Increase coal supplies by any means necessary,” he told the closed-door gathering, according to two people familiar with the discussion and a summary of the meeting seen by The Wall Street Journal.

Coal powers around 56% of the country’s industry-heavy economy, a major reason China accounts for more than a quarter of the planet’s carbon emissions.

Chinese provincial governments approved 24 domestic coal plants in the first half of 2021, according to tallies of Chinese data by the environmental group Greenpeace. Chinese localities have around 104 gigawatts in top-priority coal-power capacity planned—more than what’s currently installed in coal-hungry Japan and Russia combined—although not all of that will come online and some older plants may be closed, offsetting the net increase.

Environmentalists and many governments want China to move faster. To reach [the goal championed by advanced economies of limiting temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius this century](#), global greenhouse-gas emissions in 2030 have to be reduced to around 25 billion metric tons, from about 52 billion in 2019, according to an assessment by the U.N. Environment Program. China alone currently generates around 14 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases a year. If that number stays largely unchanged in 2030, the country would account for more than half the world’s theoretically allowable emissions.

That means the rest of the world would have to work harder if China doesn’t do more, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said at a July speech in London, noting that hitting carbon goals in that case would likely be “impossible to achieve.”

Chinese policy makers say they are planning to make up for slower climate progress before 2030 by a rapid carbon-emissions decline of as much as 10% a year over the subsequent two decades—a faster pace than anywhere in the developed world has managed so far.

China’s central government wants to be a global leader in new-energy technologies like batteries and solar power and show its people it is working to confront the country’s broader environmental problems.

“Achieving our carbon peaking and neutrality goal requires extremely arduous efforts from China,” the country’s climate envoy, Xie Zhenhua, said in an August videoconference with the Our Hong Kong Foundation, a think tank. He and other Chinese leaders say the country will be able to meet its existing targets, but moving faster is too much to ask.

The root conflict is that China just needs a lot more energy to achieve its goals of growing its economy and meeting the energy demands of its increasingly affluent population of 1.4 billion people.

Climate activists say they believe Beijing is serious about cutting coal consumption, but worry that local officials have struggled to kick the habit. Coal mining supports the economies of some of China’s poorest regions, providing millions of jobs. Some steps that officials have taken to reduce coal use in their own backyards have only succeeded in moving the problem elsewhere, eliminating some of the net gains in emissions.

Getting enough energy in a way that achieves Beijing’s 2060 net-zero emissions target will require investments of as much as \$2 trillion a year until 2060, UBS Group estimates, including a more than tripling of its current world-leading pace of renewable-energy installations. Adding to the challenge is that China can’t easily pivot away from coal until it has enough other alternatives to ensure users have reliable power.

Achieving China’s new carbon-neutral goals will require the country “to almost rebuild the way the economy has been structured,” UBS said.

Coal's importance to China's economy has been on vivid display in recent weeks, as the worst electricity shortfalls in more than a decade have rippled across the country, closing factories and threatening global supply chains.

The problems started emerging earlier this year, as demand for Chinese exports during the pandemic pushed factories to increase production of electronics, car parts and a host of other goods.

The ensuing surge in power demand coincided with a shortage of domestic coal supplies, caused in part by Chinese efforts to clean up its coal industry, and exacerbated by a political decision last year to block coal imports from Australia, which made up 5% of China's supply in 2019. As coal prices soared, power stations, which must obey official caps on rates they charge customers, reduced electricity output to avoid losses, triggering service cuts.

Social media lit up with stories of sudden power outages trapping people in elevators or poisoning workers when exhaust systems shut down without warning.

"I am afraid that I will die of heatstroke," wrote one user of China's Twitter-like microblogging platform Weibo after air conditioning went out. A video went viral of a mother pressing the alarm button on a stuck elevator as she tried to feed her baby. Government officials started worrying about the potential for social unrest when winter arrives.

President Xi Jinping ordered a relaxation of the country's rigid price structure so that coal-fired power plants could charge more and restore electricity production, according to two people familiar with the discussions. Analysts say this step, which makes fossil fuel energy more expensive, could pressure companies to accelerate their transition toward renewable-energy sources eventually.

Many of these challenges can be seen in Shandong, a province of more than 100 million on China's northeastern coast, known for its Tsingtao beer.

It is the country's top consumer of coal, which supplies two-thirds of the province's energy, including for local industry such as chemicals, metals and manufacturing. Provincial officials expect electricity use to keep increasing 4.4% a year for the next several years.

When China's central government began cracking down on air pollution in 2013, Shandong was one of the last provinces to act, much to the chagrin of Beijing, since prevailing winds blew the province's industrial discharge to China's capital.

Shandong's coal reduction efforts were "unsatisfactory," said a report from China's central environmental inspection team, which decried the illegal construction of 110 new "captive" power generation units in the province from 2013 to 2017.

Such plants make up more than a quarter of Shandong's coal plants and are typically built by private industrial companies for their own use, and don't feed into the provincial power grid. They also tend to be more polluting than other facilities. But they are well-liked by local officials because companies would often sell leftover power to nearby residents for a lower price.

Almost two-thirds of the plants Beijing cited were built by Weiqiao Pioneering Group, the parent of the world's top private aluminum producer, China Hongqiao.

To address the problem, Shandong this year for the first time pledged to cut coal consumption by 10% by 2025, adding a climate target to the economic indicators on which local officials' performance is judged. It is ramping up wind and solar power, with plans to more than double renewable-energy capacity to as much as 90 gigawatts.

“This is a major step toward reining in coal,” said Xizhou Zhou, a managing director at IHS Markit who has advised energy companies in Shandong.

Shandong still needs a reliable power source to kick in when the sun isn’t shining, the wind isn’t blowing and air-conditioners are on full blast. Batteries and other means of storing electricity could help, but the technology is still in its infancy. In 2020, China added just 3.3 gigawatts of energy storage versus 120 gigawatts of renewables, according to China Energy Storage Alliance, a Beijing-based industry association.

Shandong is planning to bring in more power from other provinces—as much as 20% of the total. But relying on imported power is “uncertain,” Shandong’s energy bureau warned in a public notification in May, since generating provinces don’t always send what they have promised and some can be lost in transmission.

Coal power remains the most reliable fallback, and the province wants to keep enough on standby, even if it isn’t fully used. The province is among those that have recently struggled with power cuts. In Zibo, a Shandong city famous for its petrochemical industry, plants recently had to halt production from 7:30 a.m. to midnight.

So the province is building 26 new coal-fired power plants and has proposed 12 more, according to data tracker Global Energy Monitor, to replace older, less-efficient plants as well as the heavily polluting coal boilers widely used for heating in northern China. The plan is to maintain the province’s current coal generation capacity of 100 gigawatts through 2025.

Shandong has been trying to shed some of its dirtiest and most energy-hungry companies, including Weiqiao.

Two years ago, Weiqiao moved part of its production to Yunnan, a lush southern province whose six big rivers and more than a hundred tributaries generate lots of inexpensive hydroelectric power. The move was lauded as a way to shift Weiqiao’s aluminum smelters from dirty coal to green renewable energy.

Yunnan, long an economic backwater, has wooed so many aluminum producers in recent years that it has been dubbed China’s Aluminum Valley.

The new arrivals, including Weiqiao, boosted local energy demand just as a drought early this year pummeled Yunnan’s ability to generate electricity. So Yunnan, which typically exports more than half its power, cut back on the amount it sent to the province of Guangdong in the east, according to energy tracker Wood Mackenzie.

Guangdong, home to corporate giants like Huawei Technologies Co. as well as the Pearl River Delta export manufacturing hub north of Hong Kong, relies on Yunnan for nearly a fifth of its power and has been eyeing industrialization there warily. Guangdong is also among the provinces in China that have confronted power outages recently.

To ensure its own energy needs are met, Guangdong had almost 14 gigawatts of coal-fired plants on its priority-development list—one of the highest totals in China, according to a tally by Greenpeace. But this September, after reprimands from Beijing, Guangdong vowed to ban new coal plant construction in the Pearl Delta River region.

China’s energy planners, hoping to make sure places like Guangdong have enough energy even as they balance environmental goals, are counting instead on the resource-rich northern province of Shanxi, one of the nation’s top producers of coal, and one of the first regions in the world to start using it thousands of years ago.

Shanxi’s provincial government has been following directives to close, merge and modernize old and inefficient mines, shutting some 30% of the province’s coal-production capacity since 2016 and

restructuring seven state-owned coal giants. Coal-related employment has fallen by more than a quarter to just over a million people during that period.

Even as Shanxi closes mines, it has kept squeezing as much as possible from the ones still in operation, with local coal output growing by around 19% since 2016. Coal mining still accounts for around 5.6% of Shanxi's employment, 17% of economic output and around two-thirds of the tax revenue paid by big companies.

Local officials don't have much incentive to change things. A 2019 World Bank proposal to spend \$350 million on speeding Shanxi's transition to a more diversified economy less dependent on coal has been in limbo for years, people familiar with its status say.

"Coal money has always come so easily to Shanxi and avoiding more job losses is important for social stability. As long as they won't die from it, they won't change," says Shi Xunpeng, a researcher at the University of Technology in Sydney and former employee at Shenhua Group, the largest state-owned coal producing company in China.

For now, Shanxi is proposing to build more coal-fired power plants. Their purpose: to export more electricity to other parts of China.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Stores: customers behind holiday shopping
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/stores-to-customers-behind-on-christmas-shopping-supply-chain-11635375486?mod=hp_featst_pos5
GIST	<p>Retailers want you to know how hard they have it this holiday shopping season.</p> <p>Along with usual deals on blenders, toys and fluffy slippers, chains this year are offering crash courses about the supply chain, staffing shortages and inventory challenges they are facing in the final months of 2021. The anxiety has trickled down to shoppers, with many shopping for Christmas before Halloween or worried they should be.</p> <p>"Best time to order? Right now!" reads a banner near the top of Lands' End home page. Its website also outlines reasons a product might not be available or delayed, including a global shipping and airfreight shortage, rail congestion and high consumer demand.</p> <p>"We want to be real with you: we're facing some unique challenges this year," starts a five-paragraph note on L.L. Bean Inc.'s website. The retailer tells shoppers to buy products they want early because of supply-chain uncertainty, worker shortages and similar issues at the companies that supply their goods.</p> <p>Some retailers are being more subtle. "Get a head start on holiday prep," said the Target Corp. website Wednesday. Target started offering 2021 holiday deals in early October, weeks earlier than pre-pandemic years.</p> <p>"I said, 'OK, if I want to get what I want to get, I better get it now,' " said Kathy McAlpine, a retiree who lives in Monroe, Maine. After the Little Tikes toy cash register her granddaughter wanted sold out at local stores, she ordered it on Amazon.com, she said.</p> <p>Ms. McAlpine said she used to wait until the weeks before Christmas to shop for gifts. Last year, after shelves emptied of toilet paper and some groceries in stores near her home, she wrapped up Christmas shopping by mid-November, the 70-year-old said. This year, she rushed to finish her holiday gift shopping this month.</p> <p>"All those products are sitting out on those ships," she said, referring to backlogs at U.S. ports of container ships delivering goods from Asia. "I just wanted to get it done so if this Covid thing took off again, I was going to make sure I had what I wanted."</p>

The explanations and nudges from retailers are a sign that many are worried about [how supply-chain problems will affect holiday sales](#) and customer satisfaction during the time of year when many bank a large percentage of their revenue. And there is plenty of upside for retailers to lock in sales early.

“We all went through the toilet paper crisis. It’s on everyone’s mind and covered every day, so much so that people are counting ships,” said Rod Sides, head of the retail and distribution practice at consulting firm Deloitte LLP. Retailers are pushing holiday deals earlier to grab their share of the spending, he said. Early buying also encourages shoppers to spend more overall, a longtime phenomenon that had retailers moving holiday deals earlier each year before the pandemic accelerated the trend. Deloitte estimates that shoppers who start buying before Thanksgiving spend around 23% more than those who start after Thanksgiving.

Carol Tomé, chief executive of United Parcel Service Inc., said Tuesday on a conference call that the company was hearing from some surveys that around 50% of shoppers aim to be done with their holiday shopping by Cyber Monday, the Monday after Thanksgiving. That has led some retailers to move holiday promotions forward, she said, which led to higher-than-usual package volumes last week.

DarDra Coaxum, co-owner of New York restaurant group Harlem Shake, said she is watching friends fret over buying gifts this month before stores sell out. She herself has decided to opt out of Christmas gifts altogether. “I’m trying to kind of skip the season a little bit,” she said.

Shopping has become stressful during the pandemic, with out-of-stock goods or long lines, said the 33-year-old. “We had a chance to just sit with ourselves and get to know ourselves” during the pandemic, she said. “I’d really like to get away from capitalism.”

All that anxiety is likely to produce brisk holiday sales. The National Retail Federation Wednesday estimated holiday sales will rise between 8.5% and 10.5% from last year—when holiday sales also grew at many retailers—totaling roughly \$843 billion to \$859 billion. The estimate for retail sales in November and December was the largest ever rise predicted by the industry group. Deloitte in September forecast holiday retail sales would increase between 7% and 9% from a year ago.

“This is the first time I’ve actually done holiday shopping in October,” said David Acharya, a 48-year-old private-equity investor who watched with alarm as his local stores carried fewer items. He knew cargo ships were piled up at ports and industrial-production data showed signs of slowing, he said. “I saw all this and said, ‘This will definitely affect Christmas.’ ”

“If there is one person in the family that would look ridiculous not having enough gifts, it’s the uncle who is the private-equity executive,” said Mr. Acharya. He said he already purchased magnetic building tiles for a niece and other toys, but is still hunting for larger electronics that have been hard to track down.

Even retail executives are getting their shopping done early. Bjørn Gulden, the chief executive of German sportswear company Puma SE, said he expects delivery delays to stretch into early next year. Covid-19 lockdown measures in Vietnam, where Puma sources around a third of its goods, port congestion in the U.S. and a lack of shipping capacity globally have all played a role in the delays, Mr. Gulden said.

“As I said to my wife, if you want to buy Christmas presents, you should buy now,” Mr. Gulden told reporters after the company released its third-quarter results on Wednesday. “It’s not a joke. I think there will be racks in retail that are more empty than you would like when you go Christmas shopping just because of the general situation.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 AG stands: memo on threats to educators
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/merrick-garland-stands-behind-memo-on-threats-to-educators-11635359305?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1

WASHINGTON—Attorney General Merrick Garland signaled he has no plans to withdraw a memo ordering the FBI to help local leaders address threats against educators, as Republicans stepped up their criticism of it as a heavy-handed effort to silence parents who speak out on topics like mask mandates and how race is addressed in schools.

Mr. Garland on Wednesday [stood behind the Oct. 4 directive](#) during a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, his second appearance before Congress in less than a week in which Republicans made it the focus of their questioning.

The single-page document calls on the Federal Bureau of Investigation to work with federal prosecutors and local officials to thwart “a disturbing spike in harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence” against teachers and school staff over politically charged issues. It instructs the FBI to “open dedicated lines of communication for threat reporting, assessment, and response,” and says the Justice Department would announce other measures to clamp down on “criminal conduct directed at school personnel.”

“The purpose of this memorandum is to get our law enforcement to assess the extent of the problem. And if there is no problem, if states and local law enforcement are capable of handling the problem, then there is no need for our involvement,” Mr. Garland said, disputing that the Justice Department is seeking to police protected speech. “This memo does not say to begin prosecuting anybody. It says to make assessments. That’s what we do in the Justice Department. It has nothing to do with politics.”

The issue of parental influence on schools, even when it doesn’t rise to the level of physical threats, has risen to prominence in several political settings, including the Virginia governor’s race, where GOP candidate Glenn Youngkin has sought to cast himself as siding with parents against school authorities. But Mr. Garland reiterated that his directive was aimed only at violence and threats of violence, not at the substance of school curricula or complaints voiced at school board meetings.

That didn’t quell the attacks from some Republican members of the committee on Wednesday. “I think most of the American people are just sort of flabbergasted if your answer is you have no regrets about this memo. Is that what you’re telling us? You think this was wise?” Sen. Ben Sasse (R., Neb.) asked in one heated exchange.

“Senator, the obligation of the Justice Department is to protect the American people against violence, including threats of violence, and that particularly includes public officials. That is still a concern for the department,” Mr. Garland responded.

The attorney general issued the directive shortly after the National School Boards Association, a group representing school boards across the country, asked President Biden in a letter for federal [help in dealing with threats to educators](#) by people opposed to face-mask mandates for stemming Covid-19 and to [the teaching of critical race theory](#).

The association on Friday apologized for the letter, which suggested the Justice Department treat attacks and threats against public school officials as hate crimes or domestic terrorism. School board associations in Missouri and Ohio withdrew from the national group, saying they weren’t consulted about the letter’s creation or its language.

“To be clear, the safety of school board members, other public school officials and educators, and students is our top priority, and there remains important work to be done on this issue,” the association said in a short note to its members. “However, there was no justification for some of the language included in the letter.”

Mr. Garland noted that his memo—which he said he crafted without having spoken to the White House—didn’t adopt the language used by the school boards group. He said threats of violence remain a concern for the federal government but offered few new details about how the memo has been implemented.

A top FBI official during a Tuesday news conference also declined to say how many meetings agents had held with local officials or answer other questions about the bureau's involvement. FBI spokespeople on Wednesday didn't immediately respond for comment.

Senators including Tom Cotton, (R., Ark.) pointed to a letter sent by the U.S. attorney's office in Montana to local law-enforcement officials, listing federal statutes that could serve as the basis for prosecuting certain threats and violent conduct. It included some felony charges such as conspiracy to deprive a person of civil rights, interstate extortion threats and cyberstalking.

"The Attorney General's directive does not seek to hinder anyone's free speech rights under the First Amendment, only to combat lawful threats and other criminal conduct," Acting U.S. Attorney Leif M. Johnson wrote in the letter, reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. "If you believe that a person has violated one of these statutes, please feel free to contact the FBI. The FBI and the United States Attorney's Office will then collaborate with any interested parties to determine if a federal investigation and prosecution should commence."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Fed signals concern on higher inflation risk
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/fed-chairman-jerome-powell-says-supply-side-constraints-are-creating-more-inflation-risk-11634917630?mod=hp_major_pos2#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell indicated he is now somewhat more concerned about higher inflation and said that the central bank would watch carefully for signs that households and businesses were expecting sustained price pressures to continue.</p> <p>"Supply-side constraints have gotten worse," Mr. Powell said Friday at a virtual conference. "The risks are clearly now to longer and more-persistent bottlenecks, and thus to higher inflation."</p> <p>While the Fed has anticipated that price pressures would abate as the pandemic subsides, Mr. Powell said it would be important for the central bank to stay flexible in the months ahead. The central bank will "need to make sure that our policy is positioned for a range of possible outcomes."</p> <p>Rising vaccination rates and the nearly \$2.8 trillion in federal spending approved since December 2020 have produced a recovery like none in recent memory. Inflation has soared this year, with "core prices" that exclude volatile food and energy categories, the Fed's preferred gauge, up 3.6% in August from a year earlier. The gains largely reflect disrupted supply chains and shortages of labor and materials.</p> <p>Mr. Powell and his colleagues have signaled strongly that the Fed would formally announce a gradual reduction, or tapering, of its monthly purchases of \$120 billion in Treasury and mortgage debt at its Nov. 2-3 meeting. Officials are likely to reduce those purchases by \$15 billion a month, allowing them to conclude the bond-buying program by next June.</p> <p>"I do think it is time to taper," Mr. Powell said Friday. "I don't think it is time to raise rates."</p> <p>The schedule for phasing out the Fed's stimulus program is faster than investors anticipated just a few months ago. Officials don't want to be in a position where they feel compelled to raise rates at a time when they are still fueling monetary stimulus by purchasing assets, and the faster timetable partly reflects how this year's surge in inflation is lasting longer than central bank officials and private-sector economists anticipated.</p> <p>In a speech in late August, Mr. Powell detailed five factors that supported his view that recent elevated inflation readings "are likely to prove temporary." Those included the absence of broad-based inflation pressures as well as an expected slowdown in price increases from items that had experienced high inflation this year, such as used cars and other durable goods.</p>

But at the same time, he concluded his assessment by noting, “We will be looking for evidence that supports or undercuts that expectation.”

Inflation data and a surge in energy prices since September point to some broadening in price pressures, and other central banks have signaled plans to raise rates more aggressively. That has fueled recent bond-market expectations of somewhat earlier and faster rate rises by the Fed.

The probability of at least two interest rate increases by the end of next year has risen above 75%, according to futures market prices tracked by CME Group. At the conclusion of the Fed’s meeting last month, investors saw around a 20% probability of two increases by the end of 2022.

Successfully managing the economic exit from the pandemic remains the greatest challenge facing Fed policy makers, Mr. Powell said. The virus essentially removed a piece of potential economic output—concentrated in high-contact service sectors, such as leisure, hospitality and entertainment industries. Officials “want to give full time for that to come back” before deliberately cooling demand for goods and services more broadly by raising rates, he said.

On the other hand, inflation is running well above the Fed’s 2% goal. “We see that. We know how painful that is” for consumers, Mr. Powell said.

“We think we can be patient and allow the labor market to heal,” he said. But at the same time, “no one should doubt that we will use our tools to guide inflation back down to 2%” if it looked like more persistent inflationary pressures were taking root, Mr. Powell added.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Health leaders: not enough getting vaccines
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3205711/cases-plateau-vaccine-herd-immunity/
GIST	<p>With the U.S. Food and Drug Administration expected to soon give emergency use authorization to the COVID-19 vaccine for 5-11 year-olds, the state is poised to add nearly 700,000 people — nearly a 10th of Washington’s population — to the eligibility list.</p> <p>But health experts fear that even that is not enough to stop future waves of the virus.</p> <p>Michele Roberts, acting assistant secretary of Prevention and Community Health, said the state is counting on about 230,000 children out of 680,000 taking the vaccine at first. That’s how many doses are set to be shipped to Washington as soon as use is granted.</p> <p>Right now, about 73% of the population ages 12 and up is fully vaccinated — about 61% of the state’s total population.</p> <p>This is still significantly below 80%, doctors’ initial calculation of the percentage needed to reach some form of herd immunity.</p> <p>“That has changed with the delta variant, which is much more infectious, so that’s a very conservative estimate, that 80% of the population would have to be fully vaccinated,” State Epidemiologist Dr. Scott Lindquist said. “And we are not anywhere near that.”</p> <p>Lindquist added that the uneven spread of vaccinated people — from 74% fully vaccinated in San Juan County to 31% in Stevens County — is also working against us.</p> <p>“We’ve got pockets of 10% or 20% vaccination, and then we have pockets of 80% to 90% vaccination, so it’s not a universal population like a model would predict. So that’s the biggest problem that we’re struggling with in Washington state is the state is not entirely equal with its vaccine coverage,” Lindquist explained. “So it will actually probably take quite a bit more than that 80%.”</p>

Lindquist said it is possible that some parts of the state never reach that figure — and those regions with the lowest vaccination rates are the places most likely to keep experiencing recurring outbreaks.

That means that the state as a whole could see future waves until some level of community immunity is reached. While case counts have come down from the summer's peak, the state's highest wave yet, the decline has now stalled at a spot on par with last winter's third wave.

"The disease is not slowing down," Lindquist said. "In some places around the state, it is actually starting to pick up again."

He attributed this rise to more gatherings taking place indoors due to the weather, people becoming lax on masking, and the reluctance of some people to get the vaccine. With party-filled holidays like Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas approaching, he is concerned — especially since each time we have a wave bigger than the one before, the baseline we start at gets even higher.

"Now this is the fifth wave, I certainly hope we can turn this around before it becomes a sixth wave, or an incredibly high plateau for the fifth wave," Lindquist said.

While COVID hospitalizations have fallen — coronavirus patients have gone from 25% of the occupancy in hospitals to 16% since last month — Lindquist said hospitals are still dangerously full, at about 91% occupancy, due to people choosing to delay care or being forced to postpone it during previous surges. If hospitalizations start to match the plateau in cases, hospitalizations could be in for new challenges.

"It is concerning that we're this high and we're starting to slow down," Lindquist said.

The good news is that hospitals are getting some help. COVID-19 Incident Commander Andrew Rose said that 1,096 federally contracted workers have arrived in Washington and are being dispersed to hospitals in need. Additional teams from the Department of Defense are giving extra help to Confluence Health in Wenatchee and Providence Sacred Heart in Spokane.

And as health officials reminded people, we know how to effectively use precautions because we have been able to bring down previous waves with masking and distancing, even before vaccines were available.

COVID-19 Response Deputy Secretary Lacy Fehrenbach said you do not need to give up celebrations as the holidays approach, but to simply be smart about it. Getting vaccinated, wearing masks, keeping gatherings small, and meeting in spaces with airflow are all ways to keep events safer.

"Your risk for COVID increases the more people you gather with, the closer you are in contact with those people, the more mixing there is of groups, and the more time you spend in confined spaces with poor ventilation especially, so indoors," Fehrenbach said. "That means if you're not vaccinated or you live in a community that has a low vaccination rate, going into winter you're at very high risk for severe disease."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Potential safety problems Boeing 767, 757
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3205637/boeing-latest-concerns-767-757-planes/
GIST	<p>Boeing hit yet another stumbling block this week, with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) flagging potential safety problems with two of its planes.</p> <p>According to a report from the Seattle Times, the company's 767 and 757 planes could have issues with the way pilot controls are laid out. The FAA believes the problem could have led to the 2019 crash of an Amazon Air cargo plane that killed three pilots onboard.</p>

	<p>Crash investigators say the plane's pilot accidentally hit a switch that was too close to a handle he was holding.</p> <p>The incident occurred in February 2019, when a Boeing 767 cargo plane crashed into a marsh near Trinity Bay, Texas. According to investigators, it's likely that the pilot unintentionally hit a lever that forced the aircraft to accelerate suddenly and pitch the nose downward, despite his hand being placed in the correct position to access the speedbrake.</p> <p>This comes on the heels of news that Boeing lost \$109 million in the third quarter of 2021, largely driven by costly issues with its 787 Dreamliner.</p> <p>According to the Associated Press, production flaws have prevented the company from delivering 787s for months now. Boeing also announced late last year that it planned to move its 787 production out of Everett to consolidate it in South Carolina. At the time, local leaders expressed concerns over how the move would effect the region's economy, with one union labeling it "a mistake."</p> <p>Boeing has been struggling to get all of its previously grounded 737 MAX planes back into circulation as well. It currently has 19 MAX planes in production at its Renton plant, having set a goal to increase that to 31 a month.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Higher food prices hit poor, food banks
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/business/economy/food-prices-us.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>With food prices surging, many Americans have found their household budgets upended, forcing difficult choices at the supermarket and putting new demands on programs intended to help.</p> <p>Food banks and pantries, too, are struggling with the increase in costs, substituting or pulling the most expensive products, like beef, from offerings. What's more, donations of food are down, even as the number of people seeking help remains elevated.</p> <p>Even well-off Americans have noticed that many items are commanding higher prices, but they can still manage. It's different for people with limited means.</p> <p>"Any time someone is low income, that means they're spending a higher percentage on needs like food and housing," said Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. "When prices go up, they have less slack in their budgets to offset and they are quick to fall into hardship."</p> <p>Before the run-up in prices — driven by supply-chain knots and rising labor costs — Robin Mueller would buy ground beef for meatloaf or hamburgers to serve once or twice a week for her family in Indianapolis. Now she can afford to cook it only once or twice a month.</p> <p>"You have to pick and choose," said Ms. Mueller, who is 52 and disabled and lives with her daughter and her husband. "Before, you didn't have to do that. You could just go in and buy a week or two's worth of food. Now I can barely buy a week's worth."</p> <p>She has turned to food banks in Indianapolis for help, but they, too, are feeling the pinch.</p> <p>A case of peanut butter that was \$13 to \$14 before the pandemic now costs \$16 to \$19, according to Alexandra McMahon, director of food strategy for the Gleaners Food Bank of Indianapolis. Green beans that used to retail for \$9 a case now sell for \$14.</p> <p>"It has a big impact," said Joseph Slater, chief operating officer of Gleaners. "It's on our minds and it's on the minds of our hungry neighbors as well."</p>

In New York, Tynicole Lewis and her daughter, Lanese, depend on food stamps, but Ms. Lewis said that the aid runs out well before the end of the month now. Lanese is diabetic and Ms. Lewis serves as much protein and vegetables as possible — foodstuffs that have become especially pricey.

“Food is expensive, and when the food stamps are gone, they’re gone,” said Ms. Lewis, who lives on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and earns \$12,000 a year as a grocery store worker. “I have to wait.”

She, too, depends on food pantries and has given up buying meat for the most part. “I eat a lot from the pantry, whatever they get,” Ms. Lewis said. “I like fish and I’ll treat myself when I get the food stamps.”

While overall consumer prices in September were up 5.4 percent from a year ago, the cost of meat is up slightly more than that. Prices of staples like dairy products, fruits, grains and oils are also rising.

Prices of meat, poultry, fish and eggs in U.S. cities are up 15 percent since the start of 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The run-up in costs at the supermarket comes even as gasoline prices have risen and natural gas and heating oil prices are predicted to be higher this winter, putting further pressure on those with low incomes.

In addition, the mammoth assistance programs rolled out by the federal government in response to the pandemic in 2020 have largely lapsed. While some households built up savings from government payments, others have little room for extra expenses.

The forces behind higher food prices have been building for some time and aren’t going away anytime soon, said Michael Swanson, chief agricultural economist at Wells Fargo.

“People are shocked, but this is a slow-motion train wreck,” he said. “The scary thing is that food companies haven’t passed along all of their costs yet.”

Higher transportation and warehousing expenses lead the list of causes, along with rising labor costs at meat processing centers and other nodes in the food supply chain.

To be sure, there are some winners as a result of the cost squeeze. While meat prices are up sharply for consumers, prices for cattle and other livestock haven’t moved as much. The result is buoyant profits for beef processors, Mr. Swanson said.

“This is not going to go backwards anytime soon,” he added. “As soon as producers and retailers get these price increases, they are very sticky.”

Behind the scenes, logistics expenses have jumped even more sharply than prices for foodstuffs, along with the costs of unglamorous items that few gave much thought to a few years ago.

A refrigerated truck shipment from California to New York that cost \$2,500 to \$3,000 before the pandemic now goes for \$10,000, according to Mr. Swanson. Big wooden pallets used to move meat or vegetables that sold for \$7 to \$9 are now priced at \$25 to \$30 apiece.

The recent trend reverses a decade of relatively low food price inflation, Mr. Swanson added, a period in which many Americans got used to buying ample supplies of beef, chicken, turkey and fish. Now that is more of a challenge.

“We do a lot of pasta and beans,” Ms. Mueller said. “It’s a lot cheaper. I miss making big meals, but it’s too hard price-wise.”

For food banks, more expensive meat and produce has stretched budgets even as the number of people seeking help has increased. At the Oregon Food Bank, which distributes food to partners across Oregon and southwest Washington, 1.7 million people sought assistance in 2020, compared with 860,000 in 2019, said Susannah Morgan, the group's chief executive.

Demand has abated somewhat more recently, but things are nowhere near pre-Covid conditions. While the number of people coming for help in Oregon will probably be closer to 1.3 million this year, "the need is still ridiculously high," Ms. Morgan said. "Your dollar goes less far in a grocery store."

The number of people the Maui Food Bank in Wailuku, Hawaii, served more than quadrupled in the early months of the pandemic, jumping from 13,000 people a month to 60,000. The food bank now helps over 20,000 each month in institutions serving mostly low-income communities, such as faith-based organizations, youth centers and senior housing sites.

"We already have the highest food prices in the country," said Richard Yust, executive director at the Maui Food Bank. "To have food prices continue to escalate creates a great deal of pressure for families who have to feed their kids."

Like Ms. Mueller in Indianapolis, the Oregon Food Bank has stopped buying ground beef. "There are certain items that are outside our reach because of the price," Ms. Morgan said. Sweet potatoes, too, are gone — the cost of transporting them from the southeastern states is now prohibitive.

To make matters worse, less food is being donated. With prices so high, retailers are no longer as willing to give away meat, said Mr. Slater of Gleaners. "We're really struggling to get meat donated at no cost," he said. "It's gone to almost zero."

Instead of cutting back, some people are working longer hours to maintain their dining habits. Dominic Kapustka of Aurora, Colo., is turning to overtime to make up for the extra spending on food.

He is paying \$100 more on his trips to the grocery store every other week, so he now spends 65 hours a week at his job as a quality control technician at a mine instead of 55 hours earlier this year.

"I haven't seen anything this bad cost-wise since the financial crisis in 2008," Mr. Kapustka said. "It seems like no matter how much I fill the cart with, the costs go up, and what I'm getting out of it is not what it used to be."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 FEMA racial disparities in disaster aid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/climate/fema-aid-racial-disparities.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Climate%20and%20Environment
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Almost a year after being urged to address racial inequity in United States disaster programs, officials are still trying to decide how to deal with the problem, according to a document issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency on Wednesday.</p> <p>The agency was responding to recommendations made in November by its own advisory panel. It is the latest evidence of the challenges facing the Biden administration in its push to reduce racial disparities in climate policy.</p> <p>"The language is very much, 'We'll explore, we'll identify, we'll consider, we'll investigate,'" said James R. Elliott, a sociology professor at Rice University who has studied racial disparities in FEMA's programs. "There seems to be a lot of hemming and hawing."</p> <p>A growing body of research shows that FEMA, the government agency responsible for helping Americans recover from disasters, often helps white disaster victims more than people of color, even when the amount</p>

of damage is the same. Not only do individual white Americans often receive more aid from FEMA, so do the communities in which they live, according to several recent studies based on federal data.

“I don’t think any of their policies are intentionally designed to be unequal,” said Emily Gallagher, a finance professor at the University of Colorado Boulder who has studied racial discrepancies in FEMA grants.

She said the data showed instead that the agency’s programs have favored disaster victims who are wealthy and own property, and who are more likely to be white, over lower-income individuals and families, who are more likely to be people of color.

“This is a really difficult problem to solve,” Dr. Gallagher said. Based on [FEMA’s response to its advisory panel](#), she added, “It really just sounds to me like they’re still working on it.”

Citing data on racial disparities, FEMA’s National Advisory Council, a group of emergency-management experts appointed by the agency, concluded in November that FEMA was failing to meet its legal obligation to help disaster victims without discrimination on racial or other grounds.

“Many FEMA programs do not consider the principle of equity,” the report read.

The council made four specific recommendations to the agency to address racial disparities more effectively.

First, it called on FEMA to create an “equity standard” — measures that would show whether the agency’s grant programs “increase or decrease equity over time.”

Second, the council recommended that FEMA decide how to make its grants to state and local governments more fair, and that it put a new system in place by the end of 2021. Data show that wealthier communities tend to get more money from FEMA than their poorer counterparts, even when the scope of the disaster is the same.

Third, the council called on FEMA to create a training program for its workers to make them more sensitive to racial diversity, equity and inclusion.

Finally, the council told FEMA to establish clear directives and policies for hiring a work force that “reflects the populations it serves.” The council asked the agency to establish those training and hiring practices by the middle of 2021.

Based on its response published on Wednesday, FEMA has yet to meet any of those recommendations.

The agency noted that it had handed responsibility for creating an equity standard back to the advisory council itself, adding that it “looks forward to receiving the resulting recommendations” in the council’s next annual report. FEMA also said it was still assessing the fairness of its grant programs to state and local governments and would consider changes once that assessment was done.

On training, FEMA said it would “conduct a review” of current programs and develop a new one if needed. And the agency said it was “expanding our outreach, recruitment and hiring engagement efforts,” but made no mention of specific new hiring directives or policies.

FEMA’s response noted few tangible policy changes so far to address racial equity. Among those it identified were creating a group to look at equity problems, which the agency said had come up with a definition of what equity means at FEMA: “The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals.”

Justin Knighten, FEMA’s director of external affairs and a member of the agency’s working group on equity, said the agency had taken steps that weren’t mentioned in the document.

	<p>“The agency has been moving across the board, on many different fronts, to drive to advance equity,” Mr. Knighten said in an interview. He said the agency’s response to its advisory committee “demonstrates that movement, but also where we have more work to do.”</p> <p>He pointed to the decision to make it easier for disaster victims to get help even if they can’t provide specific documents showing they own their property — a requirement that had disproportionately hurt Black families in the South who inherited their homes.</p> <p>Mr. Knighten said FEMA would reveal more about its plans on racial equity in its latest strategic plan, which he said was expected by the end of this year.</p> <p>But academics who study racial disparities in FEMA’s programs said the response showed an agency still trying to figure out how to respond to growing criticism.</p> <p>FEMA’s response does not provide enough information to know how seriously it is taking racial equity and whether its measures are likely to work, according to Junia Howell, a professor of sociology at the University of Illinois Chicago.</p> <p>“They could have been much more explicit,” said Dr. Howell, whose research has shown that disaster aid widens racial inequality. “When we see FEMA’s actions, we will see to what extent we are collectively moving toward a government that is serving all of its people.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Negotiator: Iran will rejoin nuclear talks
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-talks.html
GIST	<p>CAIRO — Iran will rejoin international talks on limiting its nuclear program before the end of November, its deputy foreign minister and chief negotiator said Wednesday, raising hopes that negotiations stalled since June by the election of a hard-line Iranian president can be revived.</p> <p>The official, Ali Bagheri Kani, said on Twitter that Iran had agreed to restart talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal after “very serious & constructive dialogue” with Enrique Mora, a European Union negotiator. Mr. Bagheri Kani met with Mr. Mora in Brussels this week to seek a path back to the negotiating table.</p> <p>The exact date for the new talks will be announced within a week, Mr. Bagheri Kani wrote. But he did not say who would attend — leaving open the question of whether the United States, which is at odds with Tehran over the terms of negotiations, would be participating.</p> <p>There was no immediate reaction from the Biden administration, which has tried to re-engage with Iran on its nuclear program.</p> <p>The negotiations stopped after Iran’s presidential election in June, won by an ultraconservative, Ebrahim Raisi, after his most potent opponents, including more moderate contenders, were barred from running. He replaced the president who had negotiated the 2015 deal with the United States and European powers.</p> <p>Negotiated by the Obama administration, the agreement called for Iran to limit its enrichment of uranium for 15 years, to prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon, in exchange for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions. President Donald J. Trump reimposed sanctions in 2018 in hopes that choking Iran’s economy again would force it to negotiate more restrictive terms.</p> <p>Iran’s previous president, Hassan Rouhani, had been elected amid hopes that a deal could open up Iran’s economy, offering new opportunities and better lives for a population that has lived under some form of Western sanctions for decades. But after Mr. Trump reneged on the deal, Mr. Rouhani’s approach was widely discredited, even among moderate Iranians who had supported accommodation with the West.</p>

When the Biden administration tried to restart talks this year, prospects for a new deal were already in doubt. Iran had already enriched uranium far beyond the limits set in 2015, and experts said it had made irreversible advances in nuclear technology.

In addition, the new government has an acute distrust of the United States and its European partners, and Iranian officials have questioned whether their American counterparts can be trusted not to back out of any new deal, as they did with the original.

“The new government is stocked with officials extremely skeptical about Washington and dubious that the original agreement was worth it, let alone a revived version of it,” said Henry Rome, an analyst at the Eurasia Group.

Mr. Raisi, who took office in August, ran for the presidency promising a far tougher stance toward the West. He has said he would move forward with nuclear talks only if the United States first returned to upholding its end of the bargain by canceling Mr. Trump’s sanctions.

In a previous Twitter post, Mr. Bagheri Kani said, “Iran is determined to engage in negotiations that would remove unlawful and cruel sanctions in a full & effective manner, secure normalization of trade & economic relations w/ Iran, and provide credible guarantee for no further reneging.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 UN: unequal vaccine access; economic gap
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/world/united-nations-coronavirus.html
GIST	<p>Unequal access to coronavirus vaccines in developing countries is deepening a “great divergence” between rich and poor nations and slowing economic recovery from the pandemic, the United Nations organization that monitors labor market developments said on Wednesday.</p> <p>Vaccination campaigns have proved critical in aiding recovery of working hours and economic productivity. But uneven access to vaccines has resulted in a two-speed recovery for rich and poor countries according to Guy Ryder, the director of the International Labor Organization.</p> <p>“We are building back worse at least as looked at from the perspective of the developing world,” Mr. Ryder told reporters in Geneva, adding that he will be delivering that message to leaders of the Group of 20 summit, who will meet in Rome this weekend.</p> <p>Worldwide, about 76 percent of shots that have gone into arms have been administered in high- and upper-middle-income countries, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford. Only 0.5 percent of doses have been administered in low-income countries.</p> <p>The I.L.O. estimated in a report released Wednesday that for every 14 workers who were fully vaccinated in the second quarter of the year, one full-time job was added to the global labor market. By early October, it said, 34.5 percent of the world’s population had been fully vaccinated but at rates that varied from 59.8 percent of the population in high-income countries to 1.8 percent in low income countries.</p> <p>As a result, labor market recovery has stalled in 2021 and the number of hours worked this year are now expected to be far lower than previously estimated, the I.L.O. said.</p> <p>Fiscal stimulus packages provided another key aid to recovery. But 86 percent of the stimulus available through these initiatives was concentrated in high-income economies, the organization said.</p> <p>The I.L.O. said that with more equitable distribution of vaccines it would take low-income countries little more than three months to catch up with the pace of working hour recovery in rich countries.</p> <p>The organization’s findings echo the alarm expressed repeatedly by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director general of the World Health Organization, who has slammed the unequal delivery of Covid-19</p>

	vaccines as a “catastrophic moral failure” and set a target of vaccinating 40 percent of every country by the end of the year.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Protected areas immigration enforcement
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/us/politics/biden-immigration-ice-schools-hospitals.html
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — The Biden administration on Wednesday designated the nation’s schools and hospitals, as well as a wide array of other locations, off limits to immigration enforcement, the latest sign that it is committed to protecting millions of undocumented residents from deportation while efforts to offer them a path to legalization remain stalled in Congress.</p> <p>The new guidelines, effective immediately, list “protected areas” where immigration agents are to refrain from making arrests, conducting searches, serving subpoenas or carrying out other enforcement actions.</p> <p>The sites include schools and university campuses; hospitals, clinics and other medical facilities, in addition to Covid-19 testing and vaccination sites; places of worship; and sites where children gather, such as playgrounds, day care centers and foster care facilities.</p> <p>The new list is significantly longer and more specific than the one put in place during the Obama administration in 2011, which barred enforcement actions at schools and churches. President Donald J. Trump largely ignored that policy, often leading to indiscriminate arrests.</p> <p>“Individuals should not be restrained or limited in their access to essential services,” said Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, in an interview on Wednesday before the official announcement.</p> <p>“Children should not be afraid to go to school. Their parents should not be scared to drop them off or pick them up,” he added.</p> <p>Other protected sites include shelters for victims of domestic violence and homeless people, drug and alcohol treatment facilities, food pantries and sites offering help to those fleeing natural disasters. Immigration enforcement action is also to be avoided at or near funerals, parades and demonstrations.</p> <p>The guidelines represent the third policy issued by the Biden administration in recent weeks with the goal of bringing “greater humanity” to immigration enforcement, Mr. Mayorkas said.</p> <p>They mark a profound shift in interior enforcement, and are intended, he said, to improve the day-to-day lives of millions of undocumented immigrants.</p> <p>Most of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States have lived here for a decade or longer, often with U.S.-born children and deep ties to their communities. About two-thirds of undocumented adults participate in the work force, according to the Pew Research Center.</p> <p>A memo detailing the policy, which applies to field agents for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection, said that agents must “to the fullest extent possible” refrain from enforcement action in the types of locations on the list “at all times.”</p> <p>Any exceptions must be approved by agency headquarters, the memo said.</p> <p>The guidelines come as Democrats continue to struggle to add immigration provisions to a sprawling social safety net and climate bill. Possibilities include offering protected status without citizenship to some undocumented people, and allowing immigrants who have been in the country more than a decade to apply for permanent legal residence.</p>

Since taking office, President Biden has moved away from his predecessor's tough approach to illegal immigration; the new guidelines are the most recent in a series intended to soften interior enforcement, away from the nation's border regions.

This week, two House Republicans sent a letter to Mr. Mayorkas demanding answers about the changes in enforcement priorities.

Representative Andy Biggs of Arizona deemed the new approach "an affront to the rule of law."

"Instead of preventing ICE from enforcing the law, the Biden administration should be empowering them to keep our country safe," he said in a statement.

Mr. Biden has kept in place some of the border policies introduced by Mr. Trump to staunch the influx of unauthorized migrants at the border. Still, border officials encountered a record 1.7 million migrants in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30.

During the Trump administration, many undocumented immigrants refrained from spending time outdoors with their children and limited outings to a minimum, typically to buy groceries and go to work, knowing that they could be apprehended even if they had not committed a crime.

Mr. Trump rejected the prosecutorial discretion that former President Barack Obama had exercised in enforcing immigration, instead making everyone who was in the country unlawfully vulnerable to deportation.

Mr. Mayorkas, who has presided over the new enforcement strategy, issued the first set of new interior priorities last month, directing agents at Immigration and Customs Enforcement to target for removal from the country only migrants who had recently crossed the border or people who posed a threat to public safety.

Last week, Mr. Mayorkas announced the suspension of work-site raids that can result in the arrest, and eventual deportation, of thousands of undocumented workers. The mass roundups, often at food processing plants, were a staple of immigration enforcement during the Trump administration.

"We must take a look at the population unlawfully in the country and recognize their significant contribution and presence for many years," said Mr. Mayorkas, adding that the administration needs to adopt policies that protect undocumented immigrants since Congress has failed thus far to grant them legal status.

But while the latest steps are likely to win praise from immigrant advocates, it is unclear whether rank-and-file ICE officers, many of whom favored the crackdown imposed by the former administration, will comply.

"ICE and C.B.P. have openly and brazenly defied guidance in the past," said Chris Newman, the legal director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, which has led a fight against local police collaborating with immigration authorities.

"In addition to outlining and expanding sensitive locations, the secretary should take steps to rein in the rogue agents charged with implementing the new priorities," he said.

Mr. Mayorkas said that implementation would be achieved through training, management and supervision of the agents.

The Biden administration has drawn sharp criticism from immigrant advocates who are frustrated that he has not made progress toward fulfilling his campaign promise to offer a permanent legal solution to undocumented immigrants during his first year in office.

	<p>Immigrants and their allies have been holding demonstrations across the country, from Washington, to Los Angeles, in recent weeks to pressure Democrats to include a path to citizenship in the social safety net and climate bill.</p> <p>Protesters blocked traffic last Thursday on San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge during morning rush hour, demanding that Senate Democrats "take immediate action to protect all immigrant families," according to a statement from organizers.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Air Force: details China info war revealed
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/27/details-china-info-war-outlined/
GIST	<p>China's People's Liberation Army plans to conduct extensive non-kinetic warfare operations in any future conflict with the United States, according to an internal PLA report.</p> <p>The 438-page report, "Lectures on Joint Campaign Information Operations," was translated and published by the Air Force's China Aerospace Studies Institute and reveals the strategy of seeking "information dominance" over enemies as a major weapon that will be a key factor in determining victory or defeat in battle.</p> <p>"The manifested forms of joint campaign information operations (IO) mainly are: electronic warfare, network warfare, intelligence warfare, psychological warfare, physical destruct warfare," the report from 2009 states.</p> <p>"Amongst these, electronic warfare and network warfare are the main forms of IO."</p> <p>The PLA information warfare tactics are borrowed foreign information operations in recent wars, mainly U.S. operations in Europe, the Middle East and South Asia.</p> <p>The objective of information war is to seize and control "information power" by damaging enemies' information systems, the report says.</p> <p>Like the U.S. military has demonstrated in the past, the PLA plans to launch electronic attacks, wage computer network warfare, conduct psychological warfare and employ military deception.</p> <p>The attacks will seek to influence, damage, interrupt and deprive the enemy of its human and automated military decision-making.</p> <p>At the same time, information warfare will require protecting PLA systems from foreign electronic and network attacks.</p> <p>Targets in conflict will be radar and communications nodes on land, sea, air, cyberspace and in space.</p> <p>"Electronic attack mainly includes electronic jamming, counter-radiation weapon attack, and special information warfare weapon attack and it emphasizes more on the weakening and damaging of information collection and transmission links and the targets are mainly all types of electronic information systems such as early warning detection systems, command and control systems, and communications systems," the report said.</p> <p>"Network attack mainly includes information stoppage, network infiltration, and virus attack and they mainly damage the enemy's information management through searching of network's 'loophole' and 'backdoor' and the target is mainly network type information systems."</p> <p>"Psychological attack mainly includes psychological propaganda, psychological deception, and psychological threat."</p> <p>Information attacks will require speed.</p>

	<p>According to the report, the U.S. military's "strike chain" of the time it takes from discovery of a target, to aim, then attack and lastly evaluation was 100 minutes in the 1993 Persian Gulf War. That was reduced to 10 minutes in the 2003 Iraq War.</p> <p>PLA information warfare will involve a combination of "hard" precision missile and other attacks with "soft" electronic strikes and cyberattacks.</p> <p>"On one hand, [we] must conscientiously study effective measures for bringing into play the might of the 'assassin's mace' weapons, to fully bring into play the effectiveness of the limited high- and new-tech weapons and equipment," the report said.</p> <p>Assassin's mace is China's terms for weapons that allow a weaker power to defeat a strong enemy.</p> <p>Chinese warfighting also will combine and integrate both information war and traditional kinetic warfare.</p> <p>The report reveals how the PLA is integrating peacetime and wartime information operations used in both the military and civilian sectors.</p> <p>Information warfare "is boundless and borderless, intangible and formless, and present at all times; and the peacetime-wartime demarcation line tends to blur, so that peacetime and wartime information strengths are present all along," the report states.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 US issues X gender designation passport
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/27/us-passport-x-gender-designation-first
GIST	<p>The US has issued its first passport with an "X" gender designation – a milestone in the recognition of the rights of people who don't identify as male or female – and expects to be able to offer the option more broadly next year, the state department said on Wednesday.</p> <p>The US special diplomatic envoy for LGBTQ rights, Jessica Stern, called the moves historic and celebratory, saying they brought the government documents in line with the "lived reality" that there is a wider spectrum of human sex characteristics than is reflected in the previous two designations.</p> <p>"When a person obtains identity documents that reflect their true identity, they live with greater dignity and respect," Stern said.</p> <p>The department did not announce to whom the passport was issued. A department official declined to say whether it was for Dana Zzyym, an intersex Colorado resident who has been in a legal battle with the department since 2015, saying the department does not usually discuss individual passport applications because of privacy concerns.</p> <p>Zzyym (pronounced Zimm) was denied a passport for failing to check male or female on an application. According to court documents, Zzyym wrote "intersex" above the boxes marked "M" and "F" and requested an "X" gender marker instead in a separate letter.</p> <p>Zzyym was born with ambiguous physical sexual characteristics but was raised as a boy and underwent several surgeries that failed to make Zzyym appear fully male, according to court filings.</p> <p>Zzyym served in the navy as a male but later came to identify as intersex while working and studying at Colorado State University. The department's denial of Zzyym's passport prevented Zzyym from traveling to a meeting of Organization Intersex International in Mexico.</p>

	<p>The state department announced in June that it was moving toward adding a third gender marker for non-binary, intersex and gender-nonconforming people but said it would take time.</p> <p>A department official said the full passport application and system update with the “X” designation option still need to be approved by the Office of Management and Budget.</p> <p>The department now also allows applicants to self-select their gender, no longer requiring medical certification if their gender did not match that listed on their other identification documents.</p> <p>The United States joins a handful of countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Nepal and Canada, in allowing its citizens to designate a gender other than male or female on their passports.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Cheap drug lowers Covid hospitalizations
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/27/world/covid-vaccine-boosters#antidepressant-fluvoxamine-covid-hospitalization
GIST	<p>A large clinical trial has found that a common and inexpensive antidepressant lowered the odds that high-risk Covid-19 patients would be hospitalized. The results, published on Wednesday, could open the door to new guidelines for the drug’s use both in the United States and globally.</p> <p>The drug, fluvoxamine, has been safely prescribed for nearly 30 years as a treatment for obsessive-compulsive disorder. But when the coronavirus started spreading, researchers were drawn to the medication because of its ability to reduce inflammation, potentially allowing it to quell the body’s overwhelming response to a coronavirus infection.</p> <p>Several smaller studies of fluvoxamine earlier in the pandemic showed promising results, but none was as large or persuasive as the one published on Wednesday by a group of researchers in Canada, the United States and Brazil, outside scientists said. Among nearly 1,500 Covid patients in Brazil given either fluvoxamine or a placebo, the drug reduced the need for hospitalization or prolonged medical observation by one-third, the study found. It was published in The Lancet Global Health.</p> <p>Some patients struggled to tolerate the drug and stopped taking it, the study said, raising a question among outside scientists about whether they had yet identified the ideal dose. But among those who had largely followed doctors’ orders, the benefits were even more striking. In those patients, the drug reduced the need for hospitalization by two-thirds and slashed the risk of dying: One Covid patient given fluvoxamine died, compared with 12 given a placebo.</p> <p>“That’s really good,” said Dr. David Boulware, an infectious disease scientist at the University of Minnesota who worked on a smaller, real-world study of the drug in Covid patients in California. Plus, he added, “it’s not a shiny new, expensive drug. The nice thing about this is it has a known safety profile.”</p> <p>Beyond proper dosing, the study left other questions unresolved, scientists said. Penny Ward, a visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King’s College London, noted that part of the drug’s benefit appeared to come from reducing the need for extended medical observation, which the study tracked alongside hospital admissions. And most patients in the study were unvaccinated, Professor Ward said, so it’s unclear how well the drug would work in the vaccinated.</p> <p>The new study, coming nearly a year after smaller trials of the drug, was a reminder of the difficulty that many researchers have had running large tests of Covid treatments. The Biden administration has made more funding available for such trials, scientists said, but enrolling enough patients has only gotten more difficult: Most high-risk Americans are vaccinated, and vaccine-averse people may be less likely to participate in trials.</p> <p>Because fluvoxamine is already approved for treating O.C.D., doctors can already prescribe it “off label” for Covid. But Dr. Boulware said that prescriptions of the drug had increased only slightly during the</p>

	<p>pandemic, unlike other repurposed drugs with far less scientific support, like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin.</p> <p>“It hasn’t really gotten any cult following,” he said.</p> <p>Federal treatment guidelines say that larger trials are necessary to evaluate the use of fluvoxamine for Covid, and scientists said they expected those recommendations to change on the basis of the new study.</p> <p>The new findings are also expected to boost the popularity of the drug in less wealthy countries: A 10-day course of the drug costs about \$4.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Alabama gov. pushes back federal mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/27/world/covid-vaccine-boosters#alabama-governor-pushes-back-against-president-bidens-vaccine-mandate
GIST	<p>Gov. Kay Ivey of Alabama issued an executive order this week directing state agencies to not cooperate, whenever possible, with federal vaccine mandates, describing the Biden administration’s actions as an “overreach.”</p> <p>The governor’s directive comes as some Republican governors across the country, playing to their conservative bases, have taken actions aimed at countering President Biden’s attempt to raise the country’s overall vaccination rate through expansive mandates.</p> <p>The White House has issued an order requiring all federal employees, workers for federal contractors, and people who work for health care companies receiving Medicare and Medicaid to be vaccinated. The administration also has plans to ask companies with more than 100 workers to adopt vaccine mandates or weekly testing.</p> <p>The federal mandates, along with masks in schools, are unpopular among conservatives, many of whom see them as an infringement on personal freedoms, and Republican elected officials in some states have sought to capitalize on that sentiment.</p> <p>“Alabamians are overwhelmingly opposed to these outrageous Biden mandates, and I stand with them,” Ms. Ivey said in a statement.</p> <p>In Texas, the Republican governor, Greg Abbott, issued a broad executive order that bars virtually any coronavirus vaccine mandate in the state. And in Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is seen as a possible G.O.P. presidential contender, has adamantly opposed any measures that would require vaccines or masks, saying they infringe on personal liberties.</p> <p>Ms. Ivey’s order says state agencies should prepare to assist with a lawsuit that the Alabama attorney general is expected to file challenging the federal mandate.</p> <p>Legal experts say the federal government has broad authority to address the public health crisis created by the pandemic, and Mr. Biden has predicted that his health orders will survive legal challenges.</p> <p>Beyond political symbolism, the impact of Ms. Ivey’s order is unclear. It directs state agencies not to punish businesses and people who do not comply with the federal vaccine mandate. It also states that if an agency is required to enforce the federal mandate, employees should inform those businesses or individuals that the state “does not approve, condone or otherwise endorse” such mandates.</p> <p>“The federal government’s outrageous overreach has simply given us no other option but to begin taking action, which is why I am issuing this executive order to fight these egregious Covid-19 vaccine mandates,” Ms. Ivey said in a statement.</p>

	<p>Ms. Ivey has walked a fine line on the issue of vaccinations. During the summer, she expressed frustration over unvaccinated people's refusal to get a shot, saying that it was "time to start blaming the unvaccinated folks, not the regular folks."</p> <p>"It's the unvaccinated folks that are letting us down," she told reporters in July.</p> <p>Still, Ms. Ivey said that she is "adamantly" opposed to issuing her own vaccine mandate in the state, adding that she believed the way to increase vaccination rates was through "persuasion."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Ukraine town mass vaccination success
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/27/world/covid-vaccine-boosters#ukraine-covid-vaccination-campaign
GIST	<p>VINNYTSIA, Ukraine — An experiment in Ukraine that pursued an aggressive campaign to vaccinate most inhabitants of one small town has yielded the expected results: very low infection rates and no hospitalizations for Covid-19.</p> <p>In April, when Ukraine was still short on vaccines, only certain categories of the population, like teachers and doctors, were allowed to get vaccinations. But the Health Ministry made an exception for the town of Morshyn, in western Ukraine, allowing local health authorities to attempt to vaccinate all 6,000 residents.</p> <p>Morshyn was chosen partly because its economy, which depends on tourism to resorts and spas, had essentially shut down because of the pandemic, and because it was thought people would be receptive to vaccination so they could resume working.</p> <p>The plan was to give 70 percent of the town a first dose of vaccine in one month. But despite the economic incentive, distrust in vaccines was an obstacle. Nationwide, 56 percent of Ukrainians still say they will not be vaccinated.</p> <p>Morshyn's authorities went on the offensive.</p> <p>"We realized that we need to call each person individually," Dr. Henadiy Yukshynsky, the town's chief doctor, said in an interview with local media. "We created five special teams that called people and explained to everyone the need for vaccination."</p> <p>The local authorities posted billboards, set up tents with information tables inside, made videos for social networks and the news media, and created handouts advocating vaccination.</p> <p>In the end, it took two months to vaccinate 72 percent of the town's residents, far more than Ukraine's nationwide rate of 16 percent, which is the lowest in Europe.</p> <p>Across the country, infections and hospitalizations are soaring, with an average of 21,364 new cases a day over the past week. The death rate in Ukraine is higher now than during the first wave of Covid-19, with an average of 538 deaths per day. Panic is beginning to take hold, and more areas of the country have been designated "red zones" and placed under partial lockdown.</p> <p>But life in Morshyn goes on as usual. It has no patients hospitalized with Covid-19 and only 19 cases of the virus, 15 of them in people who were not vaccinated.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Nor'easter brings hurricane force winds
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/us/cape-cod-noreaster.html
GIST	<p>BOSTON — Hurricane-force winds from an early-season nor'easter swept through coastal New England on Wednesday, a day after battering the New York City area, sending trees crashing onto power lines and cutting electricity to hundreds of thousands of households.</p>

The winds, which gusted to 94 miles per hour on Martha's Vineyard in the pre-dawn hours, [picked up a small aircraft](#) at the New Bedford Regional Airport, lifting it over a fence and onto a roadway, and [peeled the roof off an apartment building](#) in Quincy, Mass., snapping the eight-inch bolts that held it down.

"Something extreme happened in order to cause this much damage," James Marathas, the executive director of the Quincy Housing Authority, told Channel 7 News in Boston.

Scores of Massachusetts communities canceled school for the day, and subway and commuter rail service was delayed while employees removed debris and fallen trees from the tracks. At 7 p.m., more than 400,000 customers in Massachusetts, nearly 50,000 in Rhode Island and about 3,000 in Connecticut were without power, [according to PowerOutage.us](#), which aggregates data from utilities across the country.

The Weather Service in Boston [warned coastal residents](#), "For your safety indoors, stay away from windows!" [It said](#) the Nantucket area had experienced a [bomb cyclone](#), an explosive deepening of pressure that can lead to powerful wind gusts.

Overnight winds surpassed any recorded this year, said M.L. Baron, who operates a weather station in Fairhaven, Mass. Had it occurred during the winter, the storm would have been a "catastrophic blizzard," he said, setting back the region for weeks. Still, he said, coastal areas saw "the damage and destruction hurricane-force winds can deliver."

Shortly before 5 a.m., Mr. Baron listened as two men on a boat docked near New Bedford called the Coast Guard for a rescue because the dock had disintegrated and live power lines were in the water around them. "They were trapped, they couldn't get off the boat," he said, until rescuers carried them safely to land.

Coastal communities were buffeted by winds overnight, and residents awoke to widespread power outages and downed trees. The fire department in Duxbury, Mass., reported receiving 90 distress calls overnight, and warned residents against trying to navigate the roads.

In Cohasset, Mass., winds smashed the press box at a high school football stadium to splinters. A tree was uprooted on Boston's historic Beacon Hill, peeling the brick-paved sidewalk like a ribbon. Timothy Cox, the Fair Haven harbor master, spent Wednesday afternoon retrieving boats that had broken from their moorings and come to rest on land.

"This morning it was pretty crazy," he said.

National Grid, an energy provider for New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, dispatched 2,400 field personnel to repair damaged wires, poles and transmission lines, the company said in a statement, describing "significant impact to our system" that could last days in some places.

The same storm [struck the New York City area on Tuesday](#) with heavy rain, strong winds and the threat of flash floods, although the region was largely spared the type of deadly weather brought by the remnants of Hurricane Ida last month.

Roads flooded across the region, with flood warnings in effect through Wednesday for the Saddle River in Lodi, N.J., and for the Ramapo River in northern New Jersey and Orange and Rockland Counties in New York.

New Yorkers woke up on Wednesday to dry skies but gusty winds. As of Wednesday evening, only about 1,000 New York customers were without power, [according to PowerOutage.us](#). And public transit was running smoothly, with few unplanned delays.

Officials in the area had moved quickly to prepare for the nor'easter, in part scarred by the intensity of several storms this summer that exposed the region's vulnerability to extreme weather events made more frequent and intense by climate change.

	<p>The threats were brought into stark relief last month, when torrential rain brought by Ida unleashed rushing waters that killed 11 people, including a toddler and his parents, in basement apartments in New York City. At least 43 people died across New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut amid the hurricane’s watery remnants.</p> <p>“Someday maybe we’ll just have a regular rainstorm. We don’t seem to get those much anymore,” Joseph Fiordaliso, who leads New Jersey’s utility board, said at a news conference on Tuesday, adding, “Climate change is real, and we have to work to mitigate as much of it as we possibly can.”</p> <p>Another storm was set to bring heavy rain to the Northeast early in the weekend, after sweeping across the country’s midsection with gusty wind and thunderstorms on Thursday and Friday. In eastern Texas and Louisiana on Wednesday, a strong storm led to a series of tornado warnings and sightings, but no reports of widespread damage.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Japan stays tough on cannabis
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/business/cbd-japan-cannabis-marijuana.html
GIST	<p>KOBE, Japan — From an early age, Japanese society had conditioned Takayuki Miyabe to fear marijuana. But that was before his infant daughter was diagnosed with a rare form of epilepsy.</p> <p>Desperately scouring the internet for a cure, he came upon an unexpected savior: a derivative of cannabis called CBD. During a business trip to California, he bought a tiny amber bottle of the elixir, hoping for a miracle.</p> <p>Mr. Miyabe wasn’t disappointed. Weeks after his daughter began her treatments, her seizures stopped. “My thinking on marijuana did a 180,” he said.</p> <p>Now he and his wife are developing their own line of CBD oil, joining the growing ranks of Japanese entrepreneurs eager to sell the product to consumers long taught to shun anything related to cannabis.</p> <p>It won’t be easy. As most other major economies liberalize their laws on marijuana amid growing evidence of its medical benefits, Japan has doubled down on its hard-line position toward the drug, ramping up arrests and increasing efforts to battle the influx of marijuana-friendly information from abroad with public awareness campaigns and tougher laws.</p> <p>But proponents in Japan hope that CBD — which has some proven medical benefits but none of marijuana’s intoxicating effects — can become a gateway to the so-called gateway drug.</p> <p>The strategy is inspired by the United States, where news reports about CBD’s efficacy in treating certain types of pediatric epilepsy helped to change people’s minds about cannabis in general and led to widespread legal changes, said Naoko Miki, a co-founder of Green Zone Japan, a nonprofit campaigning for the legalization of marijuana.</p> <p>CBD is legal in Japan, thanks to a regulatory loophole, and its purported properties — ranging from suppressing inflammation to encouraging relaxation and sleep — make it an attractive product. Analysts estimate that annual demand for the supplement in Japan could grow to \$800 million by 2024.</p> <p>“With CBD, a lot of new people who have never been interested in either medical or recreational cannabis are entering the market. It’s like a new door opened,” Ms. Miki said.</p> <p>For entrepreneurs hoping to cash in on the “green rush” sparked by the loosening of marijuana laws in North America and Europe, Japan is a beguiling market. The world’s third-largest economy and grayest society, the country offers an ideal demographic: health-conscious, aging consumers with abundant disposable income and a bottomless appetite for supplements that promise to balm their ills.</p>

But Japan also has some of the most restrictive cannabis laws in East Asia, a region known for its intolerance of drugs.

None of the countries there are close to allowing recreational marijuana. But Taiwan and South Korea have both legalized medical marijuana amid mounting evidence of its efficacy. And China is the world's largest producer of industrial hemp and related products. (CBD can be made, but not used, there.)

Japan's censorious attitude toward cannabis is relatively recent, said Junichi Takayasu, who runs a museum on the subject in Tochigi Prefecture, north of Tokyo. There is no evidence that the plant was used in the past to get high, but hemp long figured in Japanese religious rituals, where it was valued as a symbol of purity. And it was a vital industrial crop for the resource-poor country, used to make fabric and rope through the end of World War II.

Occupying American forces encouraged legislation effectively banning cultivation of the plant as well as the possession or use of its leaves or flowers, as well as anything made from them.

Today, only about 20 farmers are licensed to produce the crop, mostly for shrines, where it is burned in purification rituals or used to make ceremonial knots.

Most Japanese people, unaware of the plant's long history in Japan, have absorbed the government line on it, Mr. Takayasu said.

Attitudes are changing, however. The number of Japanese who have reported using marijuana has more than doubled over the past decade to nearly 2 percent, according to government data, an increase officials attribute to more positive portrayals of the plant coming from abroad. (By comparison, almost half of Americans say they have tried the drug.)

The numbers are small, but for Japanese officials they represent a tectonic shift. In January, the country's health ministry convened a panel to consider options for addressing the new reality.

The members evaluated the medical evidence on cannabis, including its social impacts, according to Tsutomu Suzuki, a medical doctor who chaired the group.

"If its effectiveness and safety is confirmed, it should be used as a pharmaceutical," he said.

But when it comes to recreational usage, he said, "we need to suppress it more."

In June, the panel's final report tried to split the difference. On one hand, it recommended regulating cannabis's chemical compounds, instead of its leaves and buds, as is currently the case. In theory, the change would ease imports of products containing only trace amounts of THC, the primary molecule responsible for marijuana's intoxicating properties.

The report also recommended allowing trials of cannabis-derived pharmaceuticals, such as Epidiolex, an anti-seizure medication made from CBD. (Japan requires all drugs to undergo domestic trials.) It didn't, however, mention medical marijuana.

Still, the report's primary focus was battling marijuana's spread, including making it a crime to use it. Under the current legal regime, it said, people "are likely receiving the message that 'using marijuana is OK.'"

Recent marijuana crackdowns have raised concerns about government overreach.

In September 2020, the authorities in Tokyo detained two people for 20 days for posting on social media about marijuana and encouraging others to try it. When New York legalized marijuana in March, Japan's consulate there warned Japanese to steer clear or face potential legal consequences at home.

Arrests for the drug have almost doubled over the past five years, passing 5,000 in 2020 for the first time, according to police data. This year is on track to be much higher.

Punishments in Japan are generally light. Still, arrestees often risk being fired or expelled from school, according to Michiko Kameishi, a defense lawyer and legalization advocate in Osaka.

Society can be unforgiving. “In Japan, people are much more likely to question someone who breaks a rule than question the rule itself,” she said.

While the authorities haven’t exactly encouraged the CBD industry, they largely view it as benign.

Companies first began selling the product around 2013 after noticing that it fell under a legal loophole allowing the importation of products made from cannabis stems and stalks, as long as they are THC-free.

Sales have grown rapidly since.

Today, chic Tokyo cafes sell oils, gummies and beer made with CBD. It is available at Don Quixote, one of Japan’s largest discount chains, and on the country’s two biggest domestic e-commerce sites.

Ayumu Fukuda opened a CBD cafe near bustling Shibuya Station after encountering the supplement in California, where she was doing promotional work for the Japanese decluttering guru Mari Kondo.

She believes the product will be a hit with stressed-out Tokyoites desperate to relax: the country, she said, is in need of something to help people “become spiritually liberated.”

Still, many CBD entrepreneurs have tried to dissociate their product from marijuana, avoiding — for example — packaging that features its distinctive, spiky leaves.

“At this point, saying, hey, let’s legalize marijuana, I wouldn’t do that,” said Priyanka Yoshikawa, a former beauty queen who has launched a line of CBD-infused skin products. “I’m in the CBD market. I’m not doing it as any kind of activism.”

Mr. Miyabe, however, sees things differently.

By the time he learned about CBD, his daughter had already had one major brain surgery. Her worsening seizures had seriously delayed her cognitive development.

Treating the condition, doctors said, would most likely require a second operation that might cause permanent damage. Only a few were even willing to consider CBD as a treatment.

His positive experience with the supplement has made him wonder what other benefits cannabis has to offer.

“If we’d known about CBD earlier, she might not have needed that first surgery,” he said, as he watched his daughter playing with her younger sister in a park.

His new line of CBD oils, he said, will make the supplement — which costs his family more than \$300 a month — more affordable for other children.

The bottle features a pen-and-ink drawing of his daughter, subtly wreathed with cannabis.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 State Dept. eases diplomatic restrictions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/us/politics/diplomats-security-blinken.html

WASHINGTON — It was known at the State Department as the [Benghazi hangover](#): strict security protocols to protect U.S. officials abroad from terrorism that, in practice, limited their interactions with people in the countries where they served.

Nine years after a [U.S. ambassador and three other Americans were killed](#) during a riot in Benghazi, Libya, the State Department is easing some of the restrictions, which had made routine diplomacy more difficult during the coronavirus pandemic and as crime surged.

The shift was announced on Wednesday as part of a retooling of the department — an exercise [afforded](#) to each [secretary of state](#) — that will also solicit more input on policy from employees, expand promotion and retention efforts and upgrade aging technology systems.

But the plan is not without risk. As recently as a year ago, the Trump administration was preparing to [shutter the U.S. Embassy in Iraq](#) over concerns that it would be targeted by Iranian-backed militias that [almost overran the diplomatic compound's walls](#) in December 2019 to retaliate for a deadly drone strike against their fighters. The Trump administration also [closed the U.S. consulate](#) in Basra, in southern Iraq, in 2018 over fears that it was under similar threat. It [withdrew diplomats](#) from the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, as tensions with President Nicolás Maduro spiked in 2019.

And this August, the Biden administration [evacuated the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan](#) after the Taliban seized control of Kabul, the capital, and international diplomats fled after 20 years of war.

“A world of zero risk is not a world in which American diplomacy can deliver,” Secretary of State [Antony J. Blinken said in a speech](#) on Wednesday at the Foreign Service Institute, where the U.S. diplomatic corps is trained, to announce the changes. “We have to accept risk and manage it smartly.”

Mr. Blinken said employees had complained that “it’s harder than it needs to be for them to do the kind of on-the-ground, person-to-person diplomacy that is so essential.”

He acknowledged that the security measures had put American diplomats at a disadvantage in some cases as the United States competes with China and Russia for global influence. “Other countries are increasing their diplomatic presence worldwide with far greater ease,” Mr. Blinken said.

China is already looking to [fill the void in Afghanistan](#) that was created by the rushed American departure in August. Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China met with senior Taliban officials on Wednesday and [urged the United States](#) to step up its diplomacy to avoid a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan.

The evacuation from Kabul also led to a severe drop in morale among thousands of American diplomats over the collapse of all they had worked toward, but also over leaving behind thousands of Afghans who had [relied on the United States to deliver stability](#).

Internal reviews of the evacuation — when more than 120,000 diplomats, foreign officials and Afghans [flew out of the country](#) over two weeks in August — are continuing at the State Department. “We will not let this opportunity to learn and do better pass us by,” Mr. Blinken said.

It remains unclear when that process will be completed. Congress is eager for answers about the hasty withdrawal, which the Pentagon said [left behind more American citizens](#) than the State Department has acknowledged.

“How can we possibly say in the end that the withdrawal has left us better equipped diplomatically to face other challenges?” Senator Todd Young, Republican of Indiana, asked Brian P. McKeon, the department’s deputy secretary of state for management, at a hearing on Capitol Hill shortly before Mr. Blinken’s speech.

	Mr. McKeon described a “strong sense of mission” among diplomats who were dispatched to Kabul to help scores of Afghans who were trying to leave on military evacuation flights before the U.S. withdrawal on Aug. 30. But he also noted the emotional toll of the experience.
	“There’s an array of emotions about what was invested and in what was lost,” Mr. McKeon said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 NY denies gas power plants upgrades
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/nyregion/ny-gas-power-plants-permits-denied.html
GIST	<p>In a major win for climate advocates and supporters of wind and solar energy, New York State environmental regulators refused on Wednesday to allow two companies to upgrade their gas-fueled power plants — signaling a newly aggressive approach to ending fossil-fuel emissions that drive climate change.</p> <p>With the decision — and a strong, immediate statement of support from Gov. Kathy Hochul — the officials took a clear and potentially influential position on a longstanding question that is at the center of national and global debates on renewable energy.</p> <p>The regulators’ decision to deny the power plant upgrades in Astoria, Queens, and Newburgh, north of New York City, suggested confidence that the state will be able to build renewable energy — energy like wind and solar that comes from sources that are naturally replenishing — quickly enough and at sufficient scale to reliably supply power needs while meeting climate goals adopted by law in 2019.</p> <p>Companies that sell gas or run gas-fueled plants have argued that gas is necessary as a so-called bridge fuel until New York has an established renewable infrastructure. But scientists, climate advocates and state officials have argued that continued investment in any fossil fuel, even gas — which is cleaner than oil or coal — would confound the goal of eliminating planet-heating emissions.</p> <p>The 2019 climate law commits the state to getting 100 percent of its electricity by 2040 from sources that do not release greenhouse gases or pollute the air. By 2030, the state must get 70 percent of its electricity from renewable sources, mainly by increasing wind and solar power.</p> <p>But because the amount of energy supplied by wind and sun fluctuates with weather, energy analysts, politicians and environmental advocates have debated whether the state will need to continue to invest in building and upgrading gas-fueled facilities to ensure a steady electricity supply.</p> <p>“I applaud the Department of Environmental Conservation’s decisions” to deny the permits, Ms. Hochul said soon after the announcement, drawing a cascade of praise from climate and environmental groups. “Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time,” Ms. Hochul added. “We owe it to future generations to meet our nation-leading climate and emissions reduction goals.”</p> <p>Since her first days in office, Ms. Hochul has signaled that climate change is a top priority, investing heavily in green infrastructure and singling out the Astoria plant in particular for its association with the area of Queens known as “Asthma Alley” because of heightened childhood respiratory disease rates attributed to air pollution.</p> <p>The issue is personal for Ms. Hochul, who has publicly shared stories of her childhood in Buffalo swimming in polluted Lake Erie, which glowed at night from the chemicals being dumped there by a nearby steel plant.</p> <p>NRG Energy owns the plant in Astoria and wanted to upgrade, while Danskammer LLC sought to expand its generating capacity at the facility in Newburgh, in Orange County about 75 miles north of New York City, with a new gas-fired plant. Both plants have been operating as stopgaps — running only when the system is nearing peak capacity to back up the power grid.</p>

Though they are not operated regularly, the “peaker plants” are older facilities that emit 30 times more nitrogen oxide than newer gas-burning power plants, earning them the title of [New York’s dirtiest](#).

Both Newburgh and Astoria are considered environmental justice communities: areas with low-income or Black and Latino populations disproportionately affected by historical environmental damage, which the climate law requires the state to address.

The Astoria plant upgrade had been in the works for more than a decade, when the state first approved plans to [replace the facility](#). At the time, the promise of a new upgraded plant with a smaller carbon footprint seemed like an unrivaled good. Over the past decade, NRG Energy suggested the plant could run even cleaner — promising it might one day be converted to run off green hydrogen, a new technology that has become a buzzword in climate circles but is not yet commercially available.

The current plant is set to close in 2023 under new emissions rules.

NRG Energy lamented the regulators’ decision. “Denying projects like Astoria is simply shortsighted and bad public policy,” said Tom Atkins, vice president of development.

Danskammer, jointly owned by Agate Power and Tiger Infrastructure, did not respond to a request for comment.

Current analysis from the independent nonprofit that ensures a reliable energy supply, the New York Independent System Operator, shows that the supply would be expected to remain stable even with the planned closing of the Astoria plant. That is partly because the efficiency of wind and solar power technology has been growing and is expected to grow faster over time.

It remains to be seen if renewable building will grow at a sufficient pace to allow the state to deny all other gas projects in the future. Local opposition to renewable sources like wind farms has often arisen on aesthetic and ecological grounds, even in localities that broadly support action against climate change. But a new state law makes it easier for those projects to win approval.

None of the promised upgrades by NRG and Danskammer of the Astoria and Newburgh plants were sufficient to win Department of Environmental Conservation approval: The department said that both projects were inconsistent with statewide emissions limits. Collectively the agency received [more than 11,000 comments](#) on the applications.

Environmental and community groups marshaled their forces in opposition, drawing support from politicians including Senator Chuck Schumer, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and State Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani, who represents Astoria.

On Wednesday, the activists celebrated their success. Alex Beauchamp of Food and Water Watch [posted](#) on Twitter that the movement won “by focusing on organizing and exerting old-fashioned pressure from real people.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 JCS: close ‘Sputnik moment’ China missile
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/10/27/mark-milley-china-hypersonic-weapon-sputnik/
GIST	<p>Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said China’s test of a hypersonic weapons system is “very concerning” — and “very close” to a Sputnik moment as Beijing rapidly expands its military capabilities.</p> <p>Milley, the United States’ top military officer, said in an interview with Bloomberg Television that aired Wednesday that “what we saw was a very significant event of a test of a hypersonic weapon system.”</p>

[As The Washington Post has reported](#), national security officials were alarmed by the suspected test in August of a nuclear-capable hypersonic vehicle that partially orbited the globe before hurtling toward Earth. As China is in the midst of a rapid expansion of its strategic and nuclear weapons systems, its demonstration of hypersonic and orbital capabilities — first reported by the Financial Times — was less noteworthy to analysts for the technology, which its military has been developing for years, than for the fact that Beijing decided to test it.

Milley, noting that the term “Sputnik moment” has been used in some news reports since the test, stopped just short of that assessment.

“I don’t know if it’s quite a Sputnik moment, but I think it’s very close to that,” Milley said in an interview for “The David Rubenstein Show: Peer-to-Peer Conversations.”

The test represents a “very significant technological event that occurred,” Milley said, adding that “it has all of our attention.”

Some analysts had likened the test to the Soviet Union’s 1957 launch of a satellite called Sputnik that provided an early edge in the space race.

Milley said that the United States, too, is “clearly experimenting, and testing and developing technologies to include hypersonics, artificial intelligence, robotics — a whole wide range” and that the test reflects just one weapon system on China’s side. “The Chinese weapon capabilities are much greater than that,” he said, referring to growing capability in space, cyberspace and traditional domains of land, sea and air. “They’re expanding rapidly.”

“Now, if you take a step back, what we’re in history-wise — we’re in one of the most significant changes in what I call the ‘character of war,’” Milley said. “We’re going to have to adjust our military going forward.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 China: Taiwan no right join United Nations
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/taiwan-has-no-right-to-join-united-nations-china/6287358.html
GIST	<p>BEIJING — China insisted Wednesday that Taiwan had no right to join the United Nations, after the United States called for the democratic island to have greater involvement in the world body.</p> <p>In a statement marking 50 years since the U.N. General Assembly voted to seat Beijing and boot out Taipei, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday he regretted that Taiwan had been increasingly excluded on the world stage.</p> <p>“As the international community faces an unprecedented number of complex and global issues, it is critical for all stakeholders to help address these problems. This includes the 24 million people who live in Taiwan,” Blinken said.</p> <p>“Taiwan’s meaningful participation in the U.N. system is not a political issue, but a pragmatic one,” he said.</p> <p>“That is why we encourage all U.N. member states to join us in supporting Taiwan’s robust, meaningful participation throughout the U.N. system and in the international community.”</p> <p>China considers Taiwan — where nationalist forces fled in 1949 after losing a civil war to the communists — to be a province awaiting reunification, by force if necessary.</p> <p>It responded to Blinken’s statement with strident, albeit familiar, statements emphasizing its position that Taiwan’s government had no place on the global diplomatic stage.</p>

“Taiwan has no right to join the United Nations,” Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing, told reporters.

“The United Nations is an international governmental organization composed of sovereign states... Taiwan is a part of China.”

The United States has long called for Taiwan’s inclusion in U.N. activities.

Defense of Taiwan

But the latest statement adds to an escalation of diplomatic rhetoric and military posturing over Taiwan.

China is regularly setting records for its number of warplane flights near the island.

U.S. President Joe Biden last week told a televised forum that the United States was ready to defend Taiwan from any Chinese invasion.

Those comments were quickly walked back by the White House amid warnings from China, continuing a strategy of ambiguity on whether it would intervene militarily if China attacked.

The United States switched recognition in 1979 to Beijing.

But Congress at the same time approved the Taiwan Relations Act that obligated the supply of weapons to the island for its self-defense.

Blinken on Tuesday reiterated that the United States still recognized only Beijing.

But he emphasized the democratic credentials of the island of 23 million people.

“Taiwan has become a democratic success story,” Blinken said. “We are among the many U.N. member states who view Taiwan as a valued partner and trusted friend.”

Blinken pointed to Taiwan’s exclusion from meetings associated with the International Civil Aviation Organization and the World Health Organization.

He noted that Taiwan was hailed for its “world-class” response to COVID-19 — which largely spared the island after early intervention — and that tens of millions of passengers go through Taiwanese airports each year.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen welcomed Blinken’s remarks.

“Grateful for #US support for expanding #Taiwan’s international participation,” she said on Twitter.

“We stand ready to work with all like-minded partners to contribute our expertise in international organizations, mechanisms & events.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/26 DOD: climate change impacts nat'l security
SOURCE	https://www.npr.org/2021/10/26/1049222045/the-pentagon-says-climate-change-is-having-a-negative-impact-on-national-security
GIST	<p>The Department of Defense says climate change is already challenging U.S. national security in concrete ways.</p> <p>In a report last week, the Pentagon found that "increasing temperatures; changing precipitation patterns; and more frequent, intense, and unpredictable extreme weather conditions caused by climate change are exacerbating existing risks" for the U.S.</p>

For example, recent extreme weather has cost billions in damages to U.S. military installations, including [Tyndall Air Force Base](#) and Marine Corps Base [Camp Lejeune](#). Also, the military has bases on Guam and the Marshall Islands that are vulnerable to rising seas. And China may be able to take advantage of U.S. susceptibility, the Pentagon says.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks tells NPR that Congress should be paying attention as the Biden administration tries to [put together a clean energy plan](#) that Sen. Joe Manchin will support. The Democrat from West Virginia stymied an earlier effort.

"We need to have the rest of the government with us. We can't do it just here at DOD," she tells *Morning Edition*.

Climate change is really increasing the number and frequency of missions that we're executing here at DOD. Let's look at firefighting. Severe drought has led to increasing fire seasons, lengthening of fire seasons. It's to the point where our National Guard bureau chief has started to talk about fire season becoming fire year. And in fact, we have in the last five years gone from about 14,000 personnel days for U.S. National Guard members to, in 2021, about 176,000 person days spent just on firefighting.

You can also think about the increasing openness of the Arctic region. China and Russia and lots of countries are up there now in the Arctic and creating a new geopolitical space that didn't used to exist — space for competition in an area that we have to make sure we're monitoring. Both for search and rescue — just for simple commercial fleets that are going through there where we're protecting freedom of the seas. That increases mission space for us.

On the challenges of [climate migration](#)

Climate migration is absolutely affecting the United States directly. ... At our southern border through the Northern Triangle countries [of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras] where farmers can't grow crops, their traditional approaches to sustaining livelihood are very challenged. We've also seen that happen, of course, from Africa going up into Europe, other regions of the world.

If you switch your lens to somewhere like the Pacific region where the challenge is not so much drought, it's about sea level rise. There are [Pacific island nations that are in an existential crisis](#), and they may go underwater. Think of Bangladesh, think of portions of India, Indonesia, very populated countries where that scale of climate migration potential is significant.

How military installations and service members are affected

We are absolutely looking at the implications of climate change on our installations. I will stress that drought is also a significant factor in and around our military installations out West; sea level rise mostly affecting us on the East Coast and overseas.

So yes, the effect is: Can we even operate where we've invested to operate? What kind of mitigations do we have to put in place to deal with these factors? Frequent fire, loss of power through frequent storms like we saw in [the deep freeze in Texas](#). That's very costly and it takes us away. Those forces that are located in those locations, they aren't focusing on mission. They're not flying on their training days, perhaps, or they're not out to sea or getting prepared to go out to sea. Rather, they're moving in and out for storm purposes. All of those are ways that we both are reduced in our ability to do our main mission, and it costs us money to repair.

On what the military is doing to prepare

If there's one thing we do exceptionally well here at DOD, it's we do plan and we do it very thoroughly, and climate needs to be a part of how we think about the future and different contingencies we could get called into. ... We're going to be thinking about how we train and equip our force in a climate [change] environment. We're going to make sure we have our installation infrastructure built in a resilient way. We're going to make sure we have resilient supply chains, that we're being innovative, that we're tapping into areas like green technology here in the United States, and that we're collaborating with the private

	sector, with partners overseas and other government agencies in our research and development and ways ahead.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/26 WHO advisers: pandemic far from over
SOURCE	https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/10/who-advisors-say-covid-19-pandemic-far-over
GIST	<p>After reviewing the latest COVID-19 developments last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) emergency committee said the pandemic is far from over, though countries are making progress in rolling out vaccines and treatments.</p> <p>The group of outside advisors met on Oct 22 by video conference for the ninth time and unanimously agreed that the situation still warrants a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), which was declared on Jan 30, 2020. The group typically meets every 3 months or more often as needed.</p> <p>Concerns remain about Africa's access</p> <p>In a statement released today on its deliberations, the group raised concerns about Africa's challenges in accessing enough vaccines, tests, and treatments and in monitoring COVID-19 spread, given that many countries have gaps in lab capacity and genomic sequencing.</p> <p>The committee also said there's a critical need for all countries to use all tools at their disposal to ease the pandemic's many impacts.</p> <p>Committee members modified and extended most of their temporary recommendations but added a new one that supports uptake of WHO-recommended treatments by addressing access and affordability.</p> <p>More global headlines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent monitoring board set up by the WHO and the World Bank in 2018 to track the world's outbreak and emergency readiness in the wake of West Africa's Ebola outbreak detailed the failures in the world's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Preparedness Monitoring Board—in its new report—said the failures stemmed from inequality and inaction and were worsened by political division. It called for new efforts to address future threats, including an international agreement on health preparedness and a global summit of health leaders to tackle the topic. • In vaccine developments, the Germany-based BioNTech, which developed the mRNA vaccine marketed by Pfizer, said today that it will build a vaccine production facility in Rwanda next year, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) approved the Moderna booster, and China signaled that it will begin vaccinating children as young as 3 years old. • Meanwhile, in outbreak developments, the Chinese city of Lanzhou—the capital of Gansu province and home to 4 million people—is on lockdown after six local cases were detected, according to The Guardian. • In Europe, Russia and Ukraine—two Eastern European countries battling COVID-19 surges—reported record daily highs for deaths today. • The global total today climbed to 244,318,680 cases, with 4,960,323 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins online dashboard.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/26 Study: 'March Madness' parties Covid link
SOURCE	https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/10/study-links-march-madness-parties-more-county-covid-cases
GIST	<p>A research letter yesterday in <i>JAMA Network Open</i> ties large gatherings of unvaccinated students and nonstudents at US universities during last spring's National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) March Madness basketball tournament to COVID-19 outbreaks in the surrounding community.</p> <p>Ashley L. O'Donoghue, PhD, at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, conducted a difference-in-differences analysis to compare COVID-19 infection rates in counties surrounding the 64 universities</p>

that competed in the mid-March 2021 NCAA Men's Division I Basketball Tournament with counties in the same states with universities that were not competing.

At that time, new infections in counties with both competing and noncompeting universities were in decline, although SARS-CoV-2 variants were spreading quickly. Also, COVID-19 vaccination rates among young people were low because shots were being prioritized for older people and those at high risk for poor outcomes.

O'Donoghue derived county-level COVID-19 infection data from the *New York Times* from Jan 28 to May 25, 50 days before and after the tournament. Because celebrations tend to get bigger later in the tournament, the date of a team's last game was counted as the date of exposure to the virus.

Infections spiked 24 days after last game

Relative to counties with noncompeting universities, the estimated number of new COVID-19 infections in counties with competing universities rose significantly starting 8 days after the last game of tournament participation (13.4%; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.8% to 25.9%).

Infection rates peaked 24 days after the last game (21.8%; 95% CI, 6.4% to 37.3%) and then fell until day 30, when the difference between participating and nonparticipating counties was no longer significant (17.1%; 95% CI, -0.6% to 34.7%).

"The findings of this cross-sectional study suggest that social gatherings among unvaccinated students were associated with increased COVID-19 infections (in this scenario, slowing the previous downward trend and briefly increasing) in a university's community beginning 8 days after the event, which corresponds with the 75th percentile of time to symptom onset," she wrote.

The researcher cautioned that states vary in how they test for and report COVID-19 infections and that universities competing in March Madness may have increased surveillance testing during and after the tournament, leading to higher case counts than in other counties.

"This study identifies an urgent gap in evidence on the risk of COVID-19 spread at social gatherings among university students, although the increase in transmission was brief," she wrote. "This increase in transmission may have been brief because of increases in the vaccination rate of university students during this time or because some students may have completed their semester before the end of the study period."

In a Beth Israel [press release](#), O'Donoghue added that understanding the role of university social gatherings in community COVID-19 transmission has important implications for universities debating infection-prevention and control strategies.

"This suggests that vaccinations, surveillance testing of unvaccinated students, or other mitigation measures, are still important to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in a university's community," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 China is world's last 'zero Covid' holdout
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/world/asia/china-zero-covid-virus.html
GIST	<p>The trip began in Shanghai, where the couple, both former professors, joined a tour group of other retirees. They traveled through Gansu Province and Inner Mongolia, staying at a bed-and-breakfast and eating three times at the same lamb chop restaurant. Flying south to Xi'an, they dropped into a 1,300-year-old temple. Their fellow tour group members checked out an art museum, strolled through parks and visited friends.</p> <p>Then, on Oct. 16, the day they had planned to visit the Terracotta Warriors, the couple tested positive for the coronavirus.</p> <p>Since then, China has locked down a city of 4 million, as well as several smaller cities and parts of Beijing, to contain a fresh outbreak that has infected more than 240 people in at least 11 provinces and</p>

regions. The authorities have shuttered schools and tourist sites. Government websites have detailed every movement of the unlucky couple and their sprawling web of contacts, including what time they checked into hotels and on which floors of restaurants they sat.

The no-holds-barred response is emblematic of China's "zero Covid" policy, which has served the country remarkably well: China has reported fewer than 5,000 deaths since the pandemic began. The scale of the new outbreak, while tiny compared to many other countries, is large for China.

But the policy has also, increasingly, made China an outlier. The rest of the world is reopening, including New Zealand and Australia, which also once embraced zero tolerance. China is now the only country still chasing full eradication of the virus.

"Every locality should firmly adhere to the policy of 'Defend externally against importation, defend internally against rebound,'" Mi Feng, a spokesman for the National Health Commission, said at a news conference on Sunday. "The current control measures cannot be relaxed."

The government's strict strategy is the product of a uniquely Chinese set of calculations. Its thriving exports have helped to keep the economy afloat. The ruling Communist Party's tight grip on power enables lockdowns and testing to be carried out with astonishing efficiency. Beijing is set to host the Winter Olympics in February.

For many Chinese, the low case numbers have become a source of national pride. Xi Jinping, China's leader, has repeatedly pointed to the country's success in containment as proof of the superiority of its governance model.

But experts — both in China and abroad — have warned that the approach is unsustainable. China may find itself increasingly isolated, diplomatically and economically, at a time when global public opinion is hardening against it.

"The regime thinks it needs to maintain a 'zero Covid' policy to maintain its legitimacy," said Lynette Ong, a political scientist at the University of Toronto. "At a huge cost, though."

In the early phase of the pandemic, the Chinese Communist Party's very hold on power seemed to hinge on its ability to control the virus. Its initial attempts to cover up the outbreak in Wuhan gave rise to a stunning outpouring of public anger. Images of overwhelmed hospitals and patients begging for help flooded the Chinese internet.

As the virus barreled across the rest of the world, that narrative changed. China's strict lockdowns and mass testing campaigns, once criticized as heavy handed, became models for other countries. As deaths mounted in western democracies, Mr. Xi repeatedly emphasized how quickly China had flattened its caseload. Outrage about the initial response to Wuhan gave way to at-times strident nationalism.

Other countries that adopted "zero Covid" policies were hailed as models of competent governance that prioritized saving lives over convenience and economic growth.

As the virus has dragged into its second year, and with the onset of the far more contagious Delta variant, countries are again reconsidering their strategies. Australia, which was home to the world's longest lockdown, is scrapping quarantine requirements for vaccinated residents returning from overseas. New Zealand formally abandoned its quest for zero this month. Singapore is offering quarantine-free travel to vaccinated tourists from Germany, the United States, France and several other countries.

China has refused to change tack. When Zhang Wenhong, a prominent infectious disease expert from Shanghai, suggested this summer that China learn to live with the virus, he was attacked viciously online as a lackey of foreigners. A former Chinese health minister called such a mindset reckless.

Professor Ong said the government was afraid of any challenge to its narrative of pandemic triumph.

“Outbreaks have become so commonplace that it’s really a non-event,” she said. “But the Chinese authorities want to control any small potential source of instability.”

There are also more practical reasons for China’s hesitation. Medical resources are highly concentrated in big cities, and more remote areas could quickly be overwhelmed by an uptick in cases, said Zhang Jun, an urban studies scholar at the City University of Hong Kong.

In addition, though China has achieved a relatively high full inoculation rate, at 75 percent of its population, questions have emerged about the efficacy of its homegrown vaccines.

And, at least for now, the elimination strategy appears to enjoy public support. While residents in locked-down areas have complained about seemingly arbitrary or overly harsh restrictions on social media, travel is relatively unconstrained in areas without cases. Wealthy consumers have poured money into luxury goods and fancy cars since they’re not spending on trips abroad.

“As long as they can still feel a certain level of freedom of mobility, I think that kind of Covid-zero policy doesn’t strike the domestic audience as too severe,” Professor Zhang said.

Other governments that have chosen to live with the virus may yet lose their nerve. After lifting many restrictions this summer, Singapore reinstated them in September amid a spike in infections. (Still, the government is moving forward with travel lanes.)

But experts agree that the costs of expecting zero cases will hit eventually. China’s economic growth is slowing, and domestic travel during a weeklong holiday earlier this month fell below last year’s levels, as a cluster of new cases spooked tourists. Retail sales have proven fitful, recovering and ebbing with waves of the virus.

The country may also suffer diplomatically. Mr. Xi has not left China or received foreign visitors since early 2020, even as other world leaders prepare to gather in Rome for a Group of 20 summit and Glasgow for climate talks.

China’s hard-nosed approach is also trickling down to Hong Kong, the semi-autonomous territory and global financial hub. In trying to align their own Covid prevention policies with the mainland’s, Hong Kong’s leaders have introduced the world’s longest quarantine, ignoring escalating warnings from business leaders about an exodus of foreign firms.

And even those supportive of the restrictions wonder whether there is an exit strategy.

“I think the current policies are still in the right direction,” said Jason Qiu, 27, who grew up in Gansu Province, not far from Lanzhou, the city of 4 million now under lockdown. “But if things go on like this for a long time — for example if the pandemic is going to continue for another five or 10 years, or become endemic — maybe it would be time to consider changing some measures.”

In a potential nod to those concerns, some officials have broached the idea of loosening restrictions, though cautiously. Gao Fu, the head of China’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said in a recent interview with Chinese media that once the country reached an 85 percent vaccination rate, “why shouldn’t we open up?”

Until then, those stranded by the lockdowns have been trying to make the best of their situations. State news outlets have reported that roughly 10,000 tourists are trapped in Ejin Banner, a region of Inner Mongolia, after the emergence of cases led to a lockdown. As consolation, the local tourism association has promised them free entry to three popular tourist attractions, redeemable within the next three years.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/27/world/covid-vaccine-boosters#judge-rejects-nypd-vaccine-challenge
GIST	<p>One of the most aggressive vaccine mandates in the nation is set to take effect Friday evening in New York City, and it is expected to bring a flurry of last-minute legal wrangling, protests and possibly force some city services to be curtailed.</p> <p>Similar mandates in Texas, Florida and other municipalities have been met with a barrage of court challenges and opposition from lawmakers.</p> <p>Though some of New York City's more than 300,000 employees were already covered by earlier mandates, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced last week that "all city workers" need to get at least one vaccine dose by 5 p.m. Friday, or they would face unpaid leave.</p> <p>While most city workers have been vaccinated, about 46,000 had not been as of last week, officials said. The highest percentage of unvaccinated employees is in the city's Department of Corrections, where only half the workers had been vaccinated.</p> <p>More than a quarter of employees in other crucial departments — emergency medical services, fire, police and sanitation — remained unvaccinated as of last week.</p> <p>Mr. de Blasio's announcement of the mandates was met with protests and lawsuits.</p> <p>On Monday, thousands of people, including police officers, firefighters and sanitation workers, marched across the Brooklyn Bridge, holding large American flags and chanting that they would not comply. The city's largest police union, the Police Benevolent Association, filed suit on Monday to halt the mandate, but a New York State judge on Wednesday denied the request.</p> <p>The P.B.A. said it will appeal, and has previously instructed members on how to undermine City Hall edicts. Patrick J. Lynch, the president of the police union, said in a statement, "Today's ruling sets the city up for a real crisis."</p> <p>Andrew Ansbro, the president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association, said recently that he ordered his unvaccinated members to report to work and defy the mandate, Reuters reported. But the city's fire commissioner said he expects about a 20 percent staffing reduction at firehouses and in ambulances because of the mandate, Gothamist reported.</p> <p>Workers who do not show proof of vaccination by 5 p.m. Friday will be put on unpaid leave as of Monday. Requests for medical or religious exemptions were due on Wednesday, and workers who applied for those exemptions will be permitted to work if they undergo weekly testing while their cases are considered.</p> <p>Because of a severe staffing shortage on Rikers Island, the city made an exception for uniformed corrections officers, giving them until Dec. 1 to get their first dose. The city's health care workers and education department employees were already required to be vaccinated under earlier mandates.</p> <p>Mr. de Blasio said Wednesday the city had been preparing for the possibility of staff shortages and predicted that almost all workers would ultimately get vaccinated rather than lose their paychecks.</p> <p>"These are agencies that have been preparing for months," Mr. de Blasio said. "Every one of the commissioners has been absolutely confident that they can make the adjustments and every one of the commissioners has adamantly wanted us to move forward with a vaccine mandate. So, I feel ready."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 India slams China's new boundary law
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/india-slams-chinas-boundary-law-amid-border-tensions-80812731

GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- India criticized China on Wednesday for passing a new land boundary law which it said could impact the two countries' long-running border dispute.</p> <p>Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said India expects that China will avoid taking actions under the new law that could unilaterally alter the situation in India-China border areas.</p> <p>Talks between Indian and Chinese army commanders to disengage troops from key areas along their border ended in a stalemate earlier this month, failing to ease a 17-month standoff that has sometimes led to deadly clashes,</p> <p>Chinese lawmakers approved the law at a meeting on Sunday of the standing committee of the National People's Congress.</p> <p>It stipulates that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China are sacred and inviolable. "The state shall take measures to safeguard territorial integrity and land boundaries and guard against and combat any act that undermines territorial sovereignty and land boundaries," it says.</p> <p>Bagchi said India and China earlier agreed to seek a fair and mutually acceptable resolution of their border dispute.</p> <p>He expressed hope that the law would not affect arrangements earlier reached by the two sides on the boundary dispute or threaten peace and tranquillity in border areas.</p> <p>There was no immediate comment from China on India's statement.</p> <p>Both countries have stationed tens of thousands of soldiers backed by artillery, tanks and fighter jets along their de facto border, called the Line of Actual Control, in the Ladakh region. Last year, 20 Indian troops were killed in a clash with Chinese soldiers involving clubs, stones and fists along the disputed border. China said it lost four soldiers.</p> <p>The Line of Actual Control separates Chinese and Indian-held territories from Ladakh in the west to India's eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims in its entirety. India and China fought a war over the border in 1962.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Pakistan: violent anti-France Islamist rally
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/violent-rally-pakistan-leaves-islamists-police-dead-80811696
GIST	<p>LAHORE, Pakistan -- Violence at an anti-France Islamist rally Wednesday in eastern Pakistan left at least four police officers and two demonstrators dead, officials said. The government deployed paramilitary troops to restore order.</p> <p>Thousands of supporters of an outlawed radical Islamist party rallied on a highway in the town of Sadhuke as they marched toward the capital Islamabad. They demanded the expulsion of France's envoy to Pakistan over publication of caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad in France.</p> <p>The violence erupted a day after the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan said it would not accept the Islamists' demand to close the French Embassy and expel the French envoy.</p> <p>Khan's decision infuriated supporters of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan party who over the weekend suspended their march to Islamabad to give the government three days to consider their demands.</p> <p>Usman Buzdar, chief minister in Punjab province, said in a tweet that the violent clashes left four police dead and 253 injured. He warned of stern action against those responsible for the violence.</p>

Pakistan Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed blamed demonstrators for initiating gunfire and said the government was deploying paramilitary rangers to Punjab for two months. He asked demonstrators to end the protest and return to Lahore to avoid any government action.

Also on Wednesday, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told a news conference that Rizvi's TLP party will now be treated as a militant organization. He said violent activities of Rizvi's party would not be tolerated and the TLP cannot blackmail the government.

Earlier, Sajid Saifi, a spokesman for Saad Rizvi, the TLP's leader, said two of their supporters died when police opened fire at the rally in Sadhoke. Police say they were not aware of any deaths among demonstrators. However, police said more than 200 supporters of the TLP party were detained in a crackdown aimed at containing the spread of violence to other parts of the province.

Rallygoers have also been demanding Rizvi's release from prison. He was arrested last year during previous protests against France over the caricatures.

Rizvi's party started demanding the expulsion of French envoy in October 2020 when French President Emmanuel Macron tried to defend caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad as freedom of expression. Macron's those comments came after a young Muslim beheaded a French school teacher who had shown caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in class. The images were republished by the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo to mark the opening of the trial over the deadly 2015 attack against the publication for the original caricatures.

That enraged many Muslims who believe those depictions were blasphemous.

Since then, Rizvi's party had been threatening a march toward Islamabad, which it launched last week amid clashes that killed at least five people, including two police officers, in the city of Lahore.

Rizvi's party gained prominence in Pakistan's 2018 elections, campaigning on the single issue of defending the country's blasphemy law, which calls for the death penalty for anyone who insults Islam.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Moldova turns to Poland; tensions w/Russia
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/moldova-turns-poland-gas-amid-tensions-russia-80814049
GIST	<p>BUCHAREST, Romania -- Moldova has turned to a non-Russian natural gas supplier for the first time as the former Soviet republic seeks to avert a looming gas shortage this winter after failing to renew a long-term supply contract with Moscow.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Moldova received a million cubic meters of gas from Poland in a move aimed at diversifying its energy supply following years of strong Russian influence over the small European nation of 3.5 million people.</p> <p>Moldovan President Maia Sandu posted online Wednesday that the European Commission has pledged 60 million euros (\$70 million) to help the country with its gas crisis, and she thanked Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for her support.</p> <p>Russia had supplied all of Moldova's natural gas until September, when efforts to clinch a renewed deal with Russia's state-owned gas company Gazprom fell through.</p> <p>Gazprom over the weekend said that Moldova, Europe's poorest country, would need to settle its outstanding debts of as much as \$709 million (610 million euros) in order to extend its contract. The Russian company also warned that it would cut Moldova's gas supply on Dec. 1 if payment wasn't received.</p>

Gazprom had extended the contract for a month at the higher price of \$790 per cubic meter while Moldova's energy trading company Energocom sought an alternative gas supplier. Moldovan officials continue to negotiate with the Russian gas giant.

Moldova's Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Spinu said Sunday that Gazprom's "financial and non-financial conditions" are not in the interests of Moldovan citizens.

The deal with Polish supplier PGNiG came a week after Moldova's parliament declared a 30-day state of emergency when Gazprom slashed its gas supply by about a third and raised its prices amid a skyrocketing global gas price hike.

Moldova's foreign ministry said Monday that it needs to keep the flow of gas "at an acceptable level" to "ensure the energy security of the country."

Some observers see the gas dispute as a Russian bid to strengthen its influence over Moldova after a pro-European Union party earned a landslide win in the July 11 parliamentary election. But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied any political tinge to the gas dispute.

"There are no political issues here and there can't be any," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters Wednesday. "There is a demand for gas, there is a commercial offer along with a discount offer and the problem of accumulated debt. All that is of purely commercial character and there is no politicization here."

Peskov scoffed at the news of Moldova opting to other gas suppliers, noting that those shipments would be costlier than the Russian gas.

Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov said the Russian gas giant "can't work to make losses" and that "Moldova is provoking a crisis with its own hands."

Dionis Cenusă, an analyst at the Chisinau-based think tank Expert Group, says Moldova has been working on diversifying its gas supply routes over the last few years, particularly with Romania.

"But the endeavor was frequently politicized or lacked financial resources," he told The Associated Press. "Russia wants its influence untouched in Moldova and the current energy crisis seems to be used to balance the powers with the EU."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Moroccans protest mass vaccination rules
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/moroccans-protest-mass-vaccination-rules-skirmishes-80821488
GIST	<p>RABAT, Morocco -- Demonstrators took to the streets in cities around Morocco on Wednesday, some clashing with police as they denounced the country's decision to require coronavirus vaccination passes to be allowed to work and enter public venues.</p> <p>The decision came into effect Oct. 21 and stipulates that Moroccans must provide proof of vaccination in order to enter their workplaces. In a statement, the government has said employers have "direct legal responsibility" to enforce the decision.</p> <p>The pass is also required to access indoor services such as restaurants and banks as well as domestic and international travel.</p> <p>The North African kingdom of 36 million people has Africa's highest vaccination rate, with more than 50% of the population fully inoculated. Earlier this month, the government also started administering booster shots.</p>

	<p>But the abrupt and unusually widespread vaccine requirements have also prompted opposition, and led to big crowds at vaccination centers as people rushed to get shots.</p> <p>In the capital, Rabat, protesters gathered outside the parliament building and chanted slogans against the rule, arguing that it goes against fundamental human rights and civil liberties. Police formed a line to prevent the angry demonstrators from getting inside the legislature.</p> <p>A few protesters clashed with police as they were pushed away down Mohammed V Avenue that leads to the parliament building.</p> <p>Among protesters was Nabila Mounib, a member of parliament and the secretary general of the opposition Unified Socialist Party. She joined the protest after being barred from entering the parliament building for showing up without a vaccination pass.</p> <p>Similar scenes unfolded in other Moroccan cities, with dozens of protesters taking to the streets in the country's most populous city, Casablanca, as well as tourist hotspots of Marrakech and Agadir. They shouted "United against the pass!" as police pushed and swung batons at some of the demonstrators in an attempt to disperse them.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Growing migrant caravan southern Mexico
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/migrant-caravan-grows-southern-mexico-80818778
GIST	<p>VILLA COMALTITLAN, Mexico -- A growing migrant caravan filled the square in this town in Chiapas state on Wednesday afternoon after knocking off another 13 miles of its trek across southern Mexico.</p> <p>About 2,000 migrants had walked out of the southern city of Tapachula near the Guatemala border on Saturday. While the multitude is challenging to count, it appeared significantly larger when it left Huixtla after a day of rest and its leaders estimated its size at 4,000. It reached the town of Villa Comaltitlan on Wednesday.</p> <p>"The caravan is like a magnet, it goes sucking up people, migrants who had been in the towns (of coastal Chiapas) are joining," said Irineo Mújica, an immigration activist with the organization People without Borders.</p> <p>One of them was Bayron Zavala, a Nicaraguan migrant, who hearing that the caravan was advancing slowly, got on a bicycle and caught up with them in Huixtla. He said he would walk with them "as far as God gives us the strength ... if possible, continue to the United States."</p> <p>Without any issue, the migrants passed a customs, immigration and military checkpoint where authorities typically seize drugs and look for human smugglers.</p> <p>Though still significantly smaller than caravans in 2018 and 2019, this is the biggest group moving through southern Mexico since the pandemic started early last year. In January, a caravan left Honduras, but authorities in Guatemala broke it up.</p> <p>Other groups that have walked out of Tapachula this year have numbered in the hundreds. All were dissolved by Mexican authorities, sometimes with excessive force. Those groups were composed mostly of Haitian migrants. This caravan is primarily made up of Central Americans.</p> <p>The National Guard has not tried to intervene since it attempted to keep the migrants from Tapachula on Saturday. There were scuffles and a child was injured.</p> <p>Foreign Affairs Secretary Marcelo Ebrard said Monday the government would act "prudently," respecting the law and human rights.</p>

	<p>Mexico has deployed thousands of soldiers, police and immigration agents in the south and in recent years no large groups have made it out of the states bordering Guatemala.</p> <p>Even so, entire families keep trying. Cristina Romero wants to make it to the United States to seek treatment for her 12-year-old son who suffers from a developmental delay.</p> <p>Romero had applied for asylum in Mexico, but after waiting four months the answer came back negative. “They told me I could appeal the case, but that it could come out the same,” she said. “Then I heard about this caravan and I was up for coming.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 India test fires nuclear-capable missile
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/india-tests-nuclear-capable-missile-amid-tensions-china-80828503
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- India has test-fired a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile with a range of 5,000 kilometers (3,125 miles) from an island off its east coast amid rising border tensions with China.</p> <p>The successful launch on Wednesday was in line with "India's policy to have credible minimum deterrence that underpins the commitment to no first use," said a government statement.</p> <p>The Agni-5 missile splashed down in the Bay of Bengal with "a very high degree of accuracy," said the statement issued on Wednesday night.</p> <p>Beijing's powerful missile arsenal has driven New Delhi to improve its weapons systems in recent years, with the Agni-5 believed to be able to strike nearly all of China.</p> <p>India is already able to strike anywhere inside neighboring Pakistan, its archrival against whom it has fought three wars since gaining independence from British colonialists in 1947.</p> <p>India has been developing its medium- and long-range nuclear and missile systems since the 1990s amid increasing strategic competition with China in a major boost to the country's defense capabilities.</p> <p>Tension between them flared last year over a long-disputed section of their border in the mountainous Ladakh area. India is also increasingly suspicious of Beijing's efforts to heighten its influence in the Indian Ocean.</p> <p>Talks between Indian and Chinese army commanders to disengage troops from key areas along their border ended in a stalemate earlier this month, failing to ease a 17-month standoff that has sometimes led to deadly clashes. India and China fought a bloody war in 1962.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Probe: Myanmar military systematic torture
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ap-myanmar-military-systematic-torture-country-80828200
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia -- The soldiers in rural Myanmar twisted the young man's skin with pliers and kicked him in the chest until he couldn't breathe. Then they taunted him about his family until his heart ached, too: "Your mom," they jeered, "cannot save you anymore."</p> <p>The young man and his friend, randomly arrested as they rode their bikes home, were subjected to hours of agony inside a town hall transformed by the military into a torture center. As the interrogators' blows rained down, their relentless questions tumbled through his mind.</p> <p>"There was no break – it was constant," he says. "I was thinking only of my mom."</p>

Since its takeover of the government in February, the Myanmar military has been torturing detainees across the country in a methodical and systemic way, The Associated Press has found in interviews with 28 people imprisoned and released in recent months. Based also on photographic evidence, sketches and letters, along with testimony from three recently defected military officials, AP's investigation provides the most comprehensive look since the takeover into a highly secretive detention system that has held more than 9,000 people. The military, known as the Tatmadaw, and police have killed more than 1,200 people since February.

While most of the torture has occurred inside military compounds, the Tatmadaw also has transformed public facilities such as community halls and a royal palace into interrogation centers, prisoners said. The AP identified a dozen interrogation centers in use across Myanmar, in addition to prisons and police lockups, based on interviews and satellite imagery.

The prisoners came from every corner of the country and from various ethnic groups, and ranged from a 16-year-old girl to monks. Some were detained for protesting against the military, others for no discernible reason. Multiple military units and police were involved in the interrogations, their methods of torture similar across Myanmar.

The AP is withholding the prisoners' names, or using partial names, to protect them from retaliation by the military.

Inside the town hall that night, soldiers forced the young man to kneel on sharp rocks, shoved a gun in his mouth and rolled a baton over his shinbones. They slapped him in the face with his own Nike flip flops.

"Tell me! Tell me!" they shouted. "What should I tell you?" he replied helplessly.

He refused to scream. But his friend screamed on his behalf, after realizing it calmed the interrogators.

"I'm going to die," he told himself, stars exploding before his eyes. "I love you, mom."

The Myanmar military has a long history of torture, particularly before the country began transitioning toward democracy in 2010. While torture in recent years was most often recorded in ethnic regions, its use has now returned across the country, the AP's investigation found. The vast majority of torture techniques described by prisoners were similar to those of the past, including deprivation of sleep, food and water; electric shocks; being forced to hop like frogs, and relentless beatings with cement-filled bamboo sticks, batons, fists and the prisoners' own shoes.

But this time, the torture carried out inside interrogation centers and prisons is the worst it's ever been in scale and severity, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors deaths and arrests. Since February, the group says, security forces have killed 1,218 people, including at least 131 detainees tortured to death.

The torture often begins on the street or in the detainees' homes, and some die even before reaching an interrogation center, says Ko Bo Kyi, AAPP's joint secretary and a former political prisoner.

"The military tortures detainees, first for revenge, then for information," he says. "I think in many ways the military has become even more brutal."

The military has taken steps to hide evidence of its torture. An aide to the highest-ranking army official in western Myanmar's Chin state told the AP that soldiers covered up the deaths of two tortured prisoners, forcing a military doctor to falsify their autopsy reports.

A former army captain who defected from the Tatmadaw in April confirmed to the AP that the military's use of torture against detainees has been rampant since its takeover.

“In our country, after being arrested unfairly, there is torture, violence and sexual assaults happening constantly,” says Lin Htet Aung, the former captain. “Even a war captive needs to be treated and taken care of by law. All of that is gone with the coup. ... The world must know.”

Lin Htet Aung told the AP that interrogation tactics are part of the military’s training, which involves both theory and role playing. He and another former army captain who recently defected say that the general guidelines from superiors are, simply: We don’t care how you get the information, so long as you get it.

After receiving detailed requests for comment, military officials responded with a one-line email that said: “We have no plans to answer these nonsense questions.”

Last week, in an apparent bid to improve its image, the military announced that more than 1,300 detainees would be freed from prisons and the charges against 4,320 others pending trial would be suspended. But it’s unclear how many have actually been released and how many of those have already been re-arrested.

All but six of the prisoners interviewed by the AP were subjected to abuse, including women and children. Most of those who weren’t abused said their fellow detainees were.

In two cases, the torture was used to extract false confessions. Several prisoners were forced to sign statements pledging obedience to the military before they were released. One woman was made to sign a blank piece of paper.

All prisoners were interviewed separately by the AP. Those who had been held at the same centers gave similar accounts of treatment and conditions, from interrogation methods to the layout of their cells to the exact foods provided — if any.

The AP also sent photographs of several torture victims’ injuries to a forensic pathologist with Physicians for Human Rights. The pathologist concluded wounds on three victims were consistent with beatings by sticks or rods.

“You look at some of those injuries where they’re just black and blue from one end to the other,” says forensic pathologist Dr. Lindsey Thomas. “This was not just a swat. This has the appearance of something that was very systematic and forceful.”

Beyond the 28 prisoners, the AP interviewed the sister of a prisoner allegedly tortured to death, family and friends of current prisoners, and lawyers representing detainees. The AP also obtained sketches that prisoners drew of the interiors of prisons and interrogation centers, and letters to family and friends describing grim conditions and abuse.

Photographs taken inside several detention and interrogation facilities confirmed prisoners’ accounts of overcrowding and filth. Most inmates slept on concrete floors, packed together so tightly they could not even bend their knees.

Some became sick from drinking dirty water only available from a shared toilet. Others had to defecate into plastic bags or a communal bucket. Cockroaches swarmed their bodies at night.

There was little to no medical help. One prisoner described his failed attempt to get treatment for his battered 18-year-old cellmate, whose genitals were repeatedly smashed between a brick and an interrogator’s boot.

Not even the young have been spared. One woman was imprisoned alongside a 2-year-old baby. Another woman held in solitary confinement at the notorious Insein prison in Yangon said officials admitted to her that conditions were made as wretched as possible to terrify the public into compliance.

Amid these circumstances, COVID ripped through some facilities, with deadly results.

One woman detained at Insein said the virus killed her cellmate.

“I was infected. The whole dorm was infected. Everyone lost their sense of smell,” she says.

The interrogation centers were even worse than the prisons, with nights a cacophony of weeping and wails of agony.

“It was terrifying, my room. There were blood stains and scratches on the wall,” one man recalls. “I could see smudged, bloody handprints and blood-vomit stains in the corner of the room.”

Throughout the interviews, the Tatmadaw’s sense of impunity was clear.

“They would torture us until they got the answers they wanted,” says one 21-year-old. “They always told us, ‘Here at the military interrogation centers, we do not have any laws. We have guns, and we can just kill you and make you disappear if we want to — and no one would know.’”

The tortured prisoners were already dead when soldiers began attaching glucose drip lines to their corpses to make it look like they were still alive, a military defector told the AP. It was one of multiple examples the AP found of how the military tries to hide its abuse.

Torture is rife throughout the detention system, says Sgt. Hin Lian Piang, who served as a clerk to the North-Western Regional Deputy Commander before defecting in October.

“They arrest, beat and torture too many,” he says. “They did it to everyone who was arrested.”

In May, Hin Lian Piang witnessed soldiers torture two prisoners to death at a mountaintop interrogation center inside an army base in Chin state. The soldiers beat the two men, hit them with their guns, and kicked them, he says.

After the men were put into jail, one of them died. The major in charge asked the military’s medical doctor to examine the man and determine his cause of death. Meanwhile, the other prisoner began trembling and then died, too.

The soldiers attached the drip lines to the prisoners’ corpses, then sent them to a military hospital in Kalay.

“They forced the Kalay military doctor to write in the chest biopsy report that they died from their own health problems,” Hin Lian Piang says. “Then they cremated the dead bodies straight away.”

Hin Lian Piang says the direct order to cover up the cause of the men’s deaths came from Tactical Operations Commander Col. Saw Tun and Deputy Commander Brig. Gen. Myo Htut Hlaing, the two highest-ranking army officials stationed in Chin state. The AP sent questions about the case to the Tatmadaw but they were not answered.

Though the Tatmadaw has been open about many of its brutalities since the takeover — killing people in broad daylight, releasing photos on state TV of detainees’ bruised faces — it has used modified torture techniques and false statements to hide evidence of other widespread abuses.

Several prisoners say their interrogators brutalized only the parts of their bodies that could be hidden by clothes, which Hin Lian Piang calls a common strategy. One prisoner had his ears repeatedly slapped, leaving no scars but inflicting intense pain. Another, Min, says his interrogators placed a rubber pad over his chest and back before beating him with a rod, minimizing bruising.

“They would just make sure to hit you so that only your insides are damaged, or would severely beat you on your back, chest and thighs, where the bruises aren’t visible,” says Min.

The use of rubber pads appears to be a classic example of “stealth torture,” which leaves no physical marks, says Andrew Jefferson, a Myanmar prisons researcher at DIGNITY, the Danish Institute Against Torture.

“It seems to indicate that the torturers actually sort of care about being found out,” Jefferson says. “So few ever get convicted that I don’t really understand why they care.”

The military may be attempting to pre-empt public accounts of its abuses, says Matthew Smith, cofounder of the human rights group Fortify Rights.

“This is a technique that dictatorships have used for a very long time,” he says. “What I believe the authorities are attempting to do is at least inject some level of doubt into the allegations that that survivor or that person or human rights groups or journalists or governments may accuse them of.”

One prisoner, Kyaw, said he was tortured for days and freed only after signing a statement that he had never been tortured at all.

Kyaw’s hell began when the military surrounded his house and detained him for the second time since February for his pro-democracy activism. As the soldiers beat him and hauled him away with five of his friends, his mother wet her pants and fainted.

His usually stoic father began to cry. Kyaw knew what he was thinking: “There goes my son. He’s going to die.”

All the way to the interrogation center in Yangon, soldiers ordered them to keep their heads bowed and beat them with their guns. When Kyaw’s 16-year-old friend became dizzy and lifted his chin, a soldier bashed his head with a gun until he bled.

At the interrogation center, the soldiers handcuffed them, chained them together and put bags over their heads. His first night was a blur of beatings. “Rest well tonight,” one soldier told him.

The next morning, none of the detainees could open their swollen mouths enough to eat their rice. It was the only food Kyaw would receive for four days. He drank from the toilet.

His interrogation began around 11 a.m. and lasted until 2 or 3 a.m. The soldiers poked his thighs with a knife. They zapped him with a taser. They rolled iron rods up and down his legs.

They learned he could not swim, and kicked him into a lake, blinded by the bag on his head and paralyzed by handcuffs that bound his hands behind him. He thrashed and flailed, sinking ever deeper. They eventually yanked him out.

Their questions were monotonous. “Who are you and what are you up to?” they demanded. “I really didn’t do anything,” he replied. “I know nothing.”

Another 100 detainees arrived at the center while he was there, some of their faces so disfigured from beatings they no longer looked human. A few could not walk. One detainee told Kyaw that soldiers had raped his daughter and her sister-in-law in front of him.

On the fourth day, Kyaw’s family called on a friend with military connections to intervene, and the torture stopped. But he was still held for three weeks until the tell-tale swelling in his face went down.

Kyaw was finally released after he paid military officials around a thousand dollars. The officials then made him sign a statement saying that the military had never asked for money or tortured anyone. The statement also warned that if he protested again, he could be imprisoned for up to 40 years.

Kyaw does not know if his friends are still alive. But against his mother's pleas, he has vowed to continue his activism.

"I told my mother that democracy is something we have to fight for," he says. "It won't come to our doorsteps just by itself."

The soldiers forced the 16-year-old girl to her knees, then ordered her to remove the mask meant to protect her from COVID.

"You are not afraid of death – that's why you are here," one soldier sneered. "Don't pretend like you are scared of the virus."

Of the prisoners interviewed by the AP, a dozen were women and children, most of whom were abused. While the men faced more severe physical torture, the women were more often psychologically tortured, especially with the threat of rape.

Sixteen-year-old Su remembers kneeling with her hands in the air as a soldier warned, "Get ready for your turn." She remembers walking between two rows of soldiers while they taunted, "Keep your strength for tomorrow."

Su pleaded in vain for soldiers to help one of her fellow inmates, a girl even younger than she, whose leg was broken during her arrest. The soldiers refused to let the girl call her family.

Another girl, around 13, cried constantly and fainted at least six times the day they were arrested. Rather than call a doctor, officers sprayed the child with water.

Prison officials warned Su never to speak of what happened inside to people on the outside. "They said, 'We really are nice to you. Tell the people the good things about us,'" Su says. "What good things?"

Su had never stayed apart from her parents before. Now she was barred from even calling them, and had no idea that both her grandfathers had died.

"As soon as I was released, I had to take sleeping pills for nearly three months," Su says. "I cried every day."

Inside Shwe Pyi Thar interrogation center in Yangon, the women grew to dread the night, when the soldiers got drunk and came to their cell.

"You all know where you are, right?" the soldiers told them. "We can rape and kill you here."

The women had good reason to be frightened. The military has long used rape as a weapon of war, particularly in the ethnic regions. During its violent crackdown on the country's Rohingya Muslim population in 2017, the military methodically raped scores of women and girls.

"Even if they did not rape us physically, I felt like all of us were verbally raped almost every day because we had to listen to their threats every night," says Cho, an activist detained along with her husband.

Another young woman recalls her four months in a southwest Myanmar prison, and the constant fear of torture and rape.

“I was locked in the cell and they could call me out at any time,” she says.

A teacher, held for eight days at an interrogation center, learned to fear the sound of the cell door.

“Our thoughts ran wild, like: ‘Are they coming to take me? Or are they coming to take her?’” the teacher says. “When we saw them blindfolding someone, we were extremely anxious because that could be me.”

Not every woman was spared from violence. Cho’s cellmate was beaten so severely with a bamboo stick that she could not sit or sleep on her back for five days. And though Cho was not subjected to physical assaults at Shwe Pyi Thar, officers at Insein prison struck her on the back of her neck and forced her into a stress position.

When she objected, they beat her back and shoulders, then banished her to solitary confinement for two weeks.

For another woman, Myat, the beatings began the moment the soldiers burst into her home, smashing the butts of their guns into her chest and shoving a rifle into her mouth. As they arrested her and her friends, she heard one of them say: “Shoot them if they try to run.” She cries while recounting her ordeal.

One 17-year-old boy endured days of beatings, the skin on his head splitting open from the force of the blows. As one interrogator punched him, another stitched his head wound with a sewing needle. They gave him no pain medication, telling him the brutal treatment was all that he was worth. His body was drenched in blood.

After three days, he says, they took him to the jungle and dumped him in a hole in the ground, burying him up to his neck. Then they threatened to kill him with a shovel.

“If they ever tried to arrest me again, I wouldn’t let them,” he says. “I would commit suicide.”

Back inside the rural town hall, the young man ached for his mother as his night passed in a haze of pain. The next morning, he and his friend were sent to prison.

His small cell was home to 33 people. Every inch of floor was claimed, so he lay next to the lone squat toilet.

An inmate gently cleaned the blood from the young man’s eyes. When he looked at his friend’s battered face, he began to cry.

After two days, his family paid to get him out of prison. He and his friend were forced to sign statements saying they had participated in a demonstration and would now obey the military’s rules.

At home, his mother took one look at him and wept. For a month afterward, his legs and hands shook constantly. Even today, his right shoulder — stomped on by a soldier — won’t move properly.

He is constantly on edge. Two months after his release, he realized he was being followed by soldiers. When the sun goes down, he stays inside.

“After they caught us, I know their hearts and their minds were not like the people’s, not like us,” he says. “They are monsters.”

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/benton-harbors-water-crisis-highlights-failing-infrastructures-impact/story?id=80681291
GIST	<p>The small town of Benton Harbor is the latest example of decaying infrastructure and historic divestment leading to a water crisis in the state of Michigan.</p> <p>Car lines have been wrapped around blocks for weeks at local distribution locations where many low-income residents are collecting cases of bottled water after state and city officials advised them not to use the tap water due to high levels of lead contamination.</p> <p>"You still have to pay for water you can't drink, you can't brush your teeth with, you can't cook with, or bathe with it," said Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of the Benton Harbor Community Water Council. "No city in this country should have to go through what Benton Harbor went through for the past three years."</p> <p>Benton Harbor's water system has exceeded EPA standards for lead contamination since 2018, according to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. In six tests over that period, each six months apart, at least 10% of the water samples taken from homes and businesses in the city have shown lead contamination above 15 parts per billion.</p> <p>Pinkney, along with a coalition of environmental and community organizations, filed an emergency petition in early September asking for an intervention by the Environmental Protection Agency, citing Benton Harbor's water contamination as a "persistent, widespread, and severe public health crisis rising to the level of substantial endangerment."</p> <p>Following the petition, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order to provide bottled water, filters and premixed baby formula to residents. She also pledged to replace the city's lead pipes over the next 18 months, a project that will cost approximately \$30 million.</p> <p>"All resources are going to help Benton Harbor eliminate this problem," said Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad. "We still have many homes to test. There are over approximately 6,000 lead service lines, old infrastructure in the ground, along with homeowners who have lead pipes in the home. So this is where we have to test, investigate and as we do that we'll remove lead service lines."</p> <p>Benton Harbor's water crisis is the latest example of failing infrastructure further disenfranchising its residents. With a poverty level of 45%, according to 2019 U.S. Census data, the city has battled high unemployment and economic decline for decades due to low investment from private and government sectors, according to Muhammad.</p> <p>"The disparity, the hopelessness and abandonment in this city has gone on for years," Muhammad said, explaining that more state and federal financial resources are needed not only to replace the pipes but also revitalize the economy.</p> <p>Benton Harbor, which is 90.5% nonwhite, and where median household income is only \$21,916, according to 2019 Census data, is not unlike other poorer, majority nonwhite cities when it comes to lead water contamination.</p> <p>An ABC News analysis of EPA data shows that 1 in 6 majority nonwhite ZIP codes has at least one water district with excessive lead contamination, compared to 1 in 8 majority white ZIP codes. And 1 in 4 of America's poorest ZIP codes -- where median household income is less than \$35,000 -- has at least one water district with excessive lead contamination, compared to 1 in 11 of America's wealthiest ZIP codes, where median household income is more than \$75,000.</p> <p>Benton Harbor is one of only 76 water districts across the U.S. that has had three or more tests exceeding the EPA lead standard since 2018, according to the analysis.</p> <p>"It's an old city with old infrastructure," Gillian Conrad, communications manager for the Berrien County Department of Health, told ABC News. "It's pretty well documented that communities that have high</p>

levels of poverty and lower-income communities that are predominantly Black and brown, and communities that have suffered from disinvestment over the years -- in infrastructure, in community engagement, all of those things -- are directly correlated to environmental issues that can pop up like lead in drinking water."

Conrad is stepping down Oct. 29, unrelated to the water crisis, [instead citing](#) the COVID-19 pandemic's toll on her "mental, emotional and physical health."

Advocates say the city's crisis highlights infrastructure woes across the country.

"Unfortunately, we've really been living off of the investments of our grandparents who built the water treatment plants and who put the pipes in. Many of them, unfortunately ... they're starting to fall apart. They are failing," said Eric Olsen, senior strategic director for health at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Congressional lawmakers in Washington are [negotiating a historic deal](#) on infrastructure that would allocate a \$55 billion investment in clean drinking water, including dedicated funding to replace all lead pipes and service lines in the nation. It's a federal intervention that Olsen said states and local governments sorely need.

"Our water systems really are sort of underground ticking time bombs because not only do we have lead pipes all over the country in all 50 states, but we have these aging water mains that burst 250,000 times a year across the country," Olsen said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 RI transfers land back Narragansett Tribe
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/tribe-land-ancestors-survived-annihilation-80814583
GIST	<p>PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- The land where the Rhode Island Narragansett tribe survived near-annihilation in a battle with English colonists in 1675 has been transferred to the tribe.</p> <p>The transfer of the land from the Rhode Island Historical Society was finalized Friday. Tribal members gathered Saturday in the woods in South Kingstown at a monument commemorating what they believe to be the site of the Great Swamp Massacre, The Public's Radio reported.</p> <p>They lit three fires representing the past, present and future, and recognized the return of 5 acres land they consider sacred.</p> <p>The tribe's leaders in 1636 granted land to Roger Williams, an exile of the Puritan Massachusetts Bay colony who founded what became the city of Providence. Good relations with English colonists ended in the 1670s when the tribe was nearly destroyed in King Philip's War. The battle was fought Dec. 19, 1675. Hundreds of tribal members were killed.</p> <p>In 1906, the family that owned the land gave it to the historical society to preserve it. The society has been working on the transfer for four years so the tribe itself could protect the land. It required court approval because the land was held in a trust.</p> <p>The Narragansetts are thankful, the tribe's medicine man and historic preservation officer John Brown III told The Boston Globe.</p> <p>"For many years, the Narragansetts were visitors to a place that was theirs," he said. "Now that this has happened, we know we can go back to a place of our forefathers, where there was happiness and sorrow, and we can go there as rightful owners."</p>
Return to Top	

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Mill Creek: social media threats to school
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/mill-creek-police-investigating-social-media-threats-made-towards-jackson-high-school
GIST	<p>MILL CREEK, Wash. — Authorities are adding additional officers after reports of threats made on social media toward students and faculty at Jackson High School Thursday.</p> <p>The Mill Creek Police Department is staffing additional officers to the high school for security.</p> <p>Officials believe the social media threats made toward the high school are linked to a report made in Florida, but they are continuing to investigate.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 FBI: ransomware on the rise
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/fbi-says-ransomware-is-on-the-rise-what-is-it-and-whos-vulnerable
GIST	<p>Seattle - The Federal Bureau of Investigation is raising awareness on the prevalence and threat of ransomware attacks.</p> <p>Ransomware is when a criminal demands money in exchange to unlock a system or prevent a data leak.</p> <p>"I would say that ransomware is the most prevalent attack that we're seeing today, and the reason why we're seeing that is because it's very lucrative to our criminals," said L.T. Chu, the Senior Supervisory Intelligence Analyst in the FBI Seattle Field Office. "In 2019, we saw one ransomware variant that dominated the cyber landscape which was known as 'Ryuk'. Today, the FBI has investigations for over 100 ransomware variants."</p> <p>Access to ransomware is becoming easier for cybercriminals, according to Chu.</p> <p>"We're seeing a change in technique where criminals are not only charging you to unlock your information, but they're also charging you to not leak the information to the public," said Chu. "The FBI understands criminal organizations and how to take them down. Our strategy is to target three main things. That's the actors, their infrastructure and their money."</p> <p>In May, the Colonial Pipeline was hit with a major pipeline attack where criminals demanded more than \$4 million in ransom to unlock its computer systems, and according to Chu, the FBI investigation recovered \$2.3 million of the ransom paid.</p> <p>"The unique part of this investigation was our partnerships were so strong with this company that they were able to call the FBI early on and share the information that they had with indicators of compromise," said Chu. "Everybody is vulnerable. From private citizens to corporations to government agencies, and that's why it's so important that we protect ourselves from these attacks."</p> <p>In recent months, and even days, we've also seen media companies attacked with ransomware.</p> <p>Mike Hamilton is the Founder of Critical Insight, Inc. A cyber security company that does managing and consulting security services. He believes the attacks on media groups are a calculated move on the part of cybercriminals.</p> <p>"I think they're intentionally going after media markets Marketron was one, Sinclair was one, Cox was one. So this is starting to look like a trend now," said Hamilton. "If you disrupt a media organization or a manufacturing line or something like that, the bills start piling up right away. The loss can be calculated on a per-minute basis and you're going to do anything you need to do to get your organization back in working order and making money again."</p>

Hamilton also started a [nonprofit called PISCES](#), which stands for Public Infrastructure Security Cyber Education System. PISCES provides security monitoring for small cities and counties in return for collecting information from their networks, or metadata, that is used to train up and coming cyber security students.

"It goes over to the Washington State Academic Cyber Range where five universities teach classes on cyber. Analysts use live fire from real critical infrastructure in our state. That way we develop a workforce faster and better than any other place in the country," said Hamilton.

As for protecting ourselves, Chu believes that prevention is protection and said, "Make sure that your software is updated and patched. Secondly, back up your information and make multiple backups. Not only that, store your backups on a different server from your main server. Last but not least, refrain from clicking on any suspicious links at all costs."

Hamilton also recommends multifactor authentication, a plan in case of a security breach that has been tested and awareness about the Internet.

"The user interactive Internet exists to sell to you, to steal from you and to manipulate your opinion, and you should know that about the Internet. it's not a nice, friendly place," said Hamilton.

If you become the target of a cyberattack, the FBI said to report it by submitting a complaint on [the Internet Crime Complaint Center](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Hackers leak Israel defense ministry data
SOURCE	https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/hacker-group-leaks-data-photos-from-defense-ministry-benny-gantz-683278
GIST	<p>A hacker group called Moses Staff claimed this week that it has successfully conducted a cyberattack on the Israeli Defense Ministry, releasing files and photos it claims it obtained from the ministry's servers.</p> <p>Moses Staff's website claims that the group has hacked over 165 servers and 254 websites and compiled over 11 terabytes of data, including Israel Post, the Defense Ministry, files related to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, the Electron Csillag company and Epsilon company.</p> <p>"We've kept an eye on you for many years, at every moment and on each step," wrote the group in the announcement of the attack on their Telegram channel on Sunday. "All your decisions and statements have been under our surveillance. Eventually, we will strike you while you never would have imagined."</p> <p>Moses Staff claimed in the announcement to have access to confidential documents, including reports, operational maps, information about soldiers and units, and letters and correspondence. "We are going to publish this information to aware [sic] all the world about the Israeli authorities' crimes," warned the group.</p> <p>The files leaked included photos of Gantz and IDF soldiers and a 2010 letter from Gantz to the deputy chief of the joint chiefs of staff and chief of intelligence in the Jordanian Armed Forces. The leaked files also included Excel files allegedly containing the names, ID numbers, emails, addresses, phone numbers and even socioeconomic status of soldiers, mechina pre-military students and individuals connected to the Defense Ministry.</p> <p>The group stated on its website that it is targeting the same people who "didn't tolerate" the legitimacy of Moses, seemingly the reason for the name Moses Staff.</p> <p>The group's description states that it will not forget "the soldiers whose blood is shed due to wrong policies and fruitless wars, the mothers mourning for their children, and all the cruelty and injustice were [were]</p>

done to the people of this nation." The group did not clarify in its description which soldiers it was referring to.

It is as of yet unclear if the group is acting independently or is backed by a state.

Moses Staff leaked identifying information, addresses and information about packages from an attack it says it conducted on the Israel Post. The group also leaked pictures of identity cards from a number of companies it claims it attacked.

The group's website also has a contact form for those interested in joining the group.

THE NATIONAL Cyber Directorate stated in response to the leaks that it has repeatedly warned that hackers are exploiting a vulnerability on the Exchange email service in order to attack organizations, according to Ynet.

"The directorate once again calls on organizations to implement in their systems the latest critical updates that Microsoft has released for this vulnerability – a simple and free update that can reduce the chance of this attack," the directorate said.

"Over the past few years we have heard a great deal about exposure of soldiers' details and military information at various levels of classification as a result of information security failures on various websites and applications," said cybersecurity consultant Einat Meyron on Wednesday, adding that while most of the exposures were seemingly innocent, this incident shows that there are anonymous hacker groups systematically collecting such information.

Meyron stressed that attackers aiming to impact the image of Israel, a country that sees itself as a defense and cybersecurity power, are patient and don't reveal all their cards at once. The cybersecurity consultant urged companies to take information security seriously, adding that many companies can often protect themselves with tools they already have as long as they have a correct understanding of the risks and their consequences.

The attack is the latest in a long series of cyberattacks on Israel in recent years.

Earlier this month, the Hillel Yaffe Medical Center in Hadera was targeted by a ransomware attack that affected its computer systems.

Cybereason also revealed earlier this month that MalKamak, an Iranian state-supported hacker group, was running a highly targeted cyber-espionage operation against global aerospace and telecommunications companies, stealing sensitive information from targets around Israel and the Middle East, as well as in the United States, Russia and Europe. The threat posed by MalKamak is still active.

Last month, a hacker group called Deus leaked data it claims it obtained in a cyberattack on the Israeli call center service company Voicenter from the company's customers, including 10bis, CMTrading, Mobileye, eToro, Gett and My Heritage. The data leaked so far include security camera and webcam footage, ID cards, photos, WhatsApp messages and emails, as well as recordings of phone calls.

A series of cyberattacks has plagued Israeli businesses and institutions in the past two years, including Israel Aerospace Industries, the Shirbit insurance company and the Amital software company.

The National Cyber Directorate reported that it handled more than 11,000 inquiries on its 119 hotline in 2020, some 30% more than it handled in 2019. The directorate made about 5,000 requests to entities to handle vulnerabilities exposing them to attacks and was in contact with about 1,400 entities concerning attempted or successful attacks.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://therecord.media/hackers-steal-130-million-from-cream-finance-the-companys-3rd-hack-this-year/
GIST	<p>Hackers have stolen an estimated \$130 million worth of cryptocurrency assets from Cream Finance, a decentralized finance (DeFi) platform that allows users to loan and speculate on cryptocurrency price variations.</p> <p>The incident, detected earlier today by blockchain security firms PeckShield and SlowMist, was confirmed by the Cream Finance team earlier today.</p> <p>The attackers are believed to have found a vulnerability in the platform's lending system —called flash loaning— and used it to steal all of Cream's assets and tokens running on the Ethereum blockchain, according to blockchain security firm BlockSec, which also posted an explanation of the security flaw on Twitter earlier today.</p> <p>Roughly six hours after the attack, Cream Finance said it fixed the bug exploited in the hack with the help of cryptocurrency platform Yearn.</p> <p>Even if the attacker's initial wallet, used to exfiltrate a large chunk of the funds, has been identified, the funds have already been moved to new accounts, and there appears to be a small chance the stolen crypto can be tracked down and returned to the platform.</p> <p>Third time's a charm Today's hack marks the third time Cream Finance has been hacked this year after the company lost \$37 million in February and another \$29 million in August.</p> <p>All attacks were flash loan exploits, a common way through which most DeFi platforms have been hacked over the past two years.</p> <p>DeFi related hacks have accounted for 76% of all major hacks in 2021, and users have lost more than \$474 million to attacks on DeFi platforms this year, CipherTrace said in a report in August.</p> <p>Similarly, DeFi hacks also made up 21% of all the 2020 cryptocurrency hacks and stolen funds after being almost inexistent a year before, in 2019, the same CipherTrace said in a report last year.</p> <p>The Cream heist also marks the second-largest cryptocurrency hack this year after DeFi platform Poly Network lost \$600 million in August. However, the individual behind the Poly hack eventually returned all the stolen funds two weeks later on the promise the company won't seek charges.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/26 More Facebook-fueled violence inevitable?
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/more-violent-events-driven-by-social-media-are-bound-to-happen-says-facebook-whistleblower/
GIST	<p>Social media platforms that use opaque algorithms to spread harmful content should be reined in, otherwise they may trigger a growing number of violent events such as the attacks on the US Capitol Building that occurred last January, according to Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen.</p> <p>According to Haugen, events like the Capitol riots, and other social media-fuelled conflicts, are a foretaste of what's yet to come.</p> <p>"I have no doubt that the events we're seeing around the world, things like Myanmar and Ethiopia, those are the opening chapters," said Haugen. "Because engagement-based rating does two things. One, it prioritises and amplifies divisive, polarising, extreme content. And two, it concentrates it."</p> <p>Haugen was speaking in London before the UK Parliament as part of an investigation into the draft Online Safety Bill that was put forward by the government earlier this year. This bill proposes to force companies</p>

to protect their users from harmful content ranging from revenge porn to disinformation, through hate speech and racist abuse.

Parliamentarians were taking evidence from Haugen because [she has recently come to the fore as the whistleblower behind bombshell leaked internal documents](#) from Facebook, including internal files, draft presentations, research and staff communications, which she obtained while working as the lead product manager for Facebook's civic misinformation team.

Now known as the Facebook Files, the leaks were published by *The Wall Street Journal* and explore a variety of topics, including the use of different content moderation policies for high-profile users, the spread of misinformation and the impact of Instagram on teenagers' mental health. The disclosures have even become a catalyst for a Senate inquiry into Facebook's operations.

In this context, said Haugen, governments have to step up and implement stricter regulation. "I came forward now because now is the time to act," said Haugen. "The failures of Facebook are making it harder to act."

Haugen argued that the social media giant is "unquestionably" making hate worse, in particular because of its use of an engagement-based ranking algorithm, which pushes content that is likely to create more engagement further towards the top of users' timelines.

Because extreme content tends to be more viral, this can create an echo-chamber effect, meaning that users can be pushed down a rabbit-hole and end up consuming content that's increasingly polarising and divisive.

For example, someone looking for healthy recipes could start seeing content related to anorexia; and someone reading right-wing content could be pushed towards extreme-right posts. The problem isn't limited to Facebook: similar allegations [were previously made by ex-Google software engineer Guillaume Chaslot](#) against YouTube's recommendation algorithm.

"The danger with Facebook is not individuals saying bad things; it is about the systems of amplification that disproportionately give people saying extreme, polarising things the largest megaphone in the room," said Haugen.

The issue also expands to paid-for advertising, according to the whistleblower. With divisive ads more likely to create engagement, it is much cheaper to run "angry" advertising campaigns, which led Haugen to say that the current system is subsidising hate on social media platforms.

This is something that Facebook has refuted: in the week preceding Haugen's appearance in the UK Parliament, the social media giant [published a report](#) claiming that hate speech prevalence has dropped by almost 50% on the platform over the past three quarters and now accounts for only 0.05% of all content viewed.

A Facebook spokesperson said: "Contrary to what was discussed at the hearing, we've always had the commercial incentive to remove harmful content from our sites. People don't want to see it when they use our apps and advertisers don't want their ads next to it. That's why we've invested \$13 billion and hired 40,000 people to do one job: keep people safe on our apps."

But Haugen argues Facebook won't self-regulate in order to protect its users, because lower engagement rates are contradictory to the company's business model. "Facebook has been unwilling to accept even little slivers of profit being sacrificed for safety," she said, falling in line with claims that she made previously that the company was "morally corrupt" and chose to grow profits at all costs.

Government action required

To avoid the escalation of events into further violent protests, therefore, will require government action. Haugen applauded the UK's efforts in drafting the Online Safety Bill, calling the proposed laws "world-

leading" when it comes to regulating social platforms, and in particular highlighting the need to mandate a duty of care on companies like Facebook to protect users.

"I can't imagine Mark isn't paying attention to what you're doing," said Haugen when asked whether the bill might be keeping Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg awake at night.

Haugen recommended that the Online Safety Bill should include mandatory risk assessments for engagement-based ranking systems, which would be overseen by external regulators rather than boards within Facebook; and that concerns about paid-for advertising be included in the bill.

She also suggested requiring Facebook to make data available to researchers outside of the company, to allow the investigation of potential issues from the outside, and recommended the mandatory moderation of Facebook groups when they exceed a certain number of users.

Finally, Haugen addressed the issue of end-to-end encryption, which has sparked controversy since the publication of the draft bill. Freedom of speech groups, in effect, have voiced concern that the bill [will require abolishing end-to-end encryption](#), to enable social media platforms to scan private messages and search for harmful content – at the cost of user privacy.

"I support access to end-to-end encryption and I use open-source end-to-end encryption every day," said Haugen. "My social support network is currently on an open-source end-to-end encryption service."

Facebook's plans for end-to-end encryption, continued Haugen, are problematic because the product is not open-source, making it impossible to verify the degree to which users will effectively be protected. This may result in some users sharing sensitive information online while thinking that their data is encrypted, she argued, when in fact it may be in danger of being read by third parties.

Facebook, for its part, has welcomed the UK's attempt to regulate social media platforms. "While we have rules against harmful content and publish regular transparency reports, we agree we need regulation for the whole industry so that businesses like ours aren't making these decisions on our own," said a Facebook spokesperson. "The UK is one of the countries leading the way and we're pleased the Online Safety Bill is moving forward."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Uptick password spraying attacks
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/microsoft-warns-over-uptick-in-password-spraying-attacks/
GIST	<p>Cyber attackers aren't just looking for software flaws, supply chain weakness, and open RDP connections. The other key asset hackers are after is identities, especially account details that will give them access to other internal systems.</p> <p>CISA earlier this year warned that the suspected Kremlin-backed hackers behind the SolarWinds attacks were not just trojanising software updates, but also password guessing and password spraying administrative accounts for initial access.</p> <p>More recently, Microsoft observed an emerging Iranian hacking group using password spraying against Israeli and US critical infrastructure targets operating in the Persian Gulf.</p> <p>Microsoft estimates that more than a third of account compromises are password spraying attacks, even though such attacks have a 1% success rate for accounts, unless organisations use Microsoft's 'password protection' to avoid bad passwords.</p> <p>"Instead of trying <i>many passwords against one user</i>, they try to defeat lockout and detection by trying <i>many users against one password</i>," Microsoft explained last year. That approach helps avoid rate limiting, where too many failed password attempt results in a lockout.</p>

[Microsoft's Detection and Response Team \(DART\) has outlined](#) two main password spray techniques, the first of which it calls 'low and slow'. Here, a determined attacker deploys a sophisticated password spray using "several individual IP address to attack multiple accounts at the same time with a limited number of curated password guesses."

The other technique, 'availability and reuse', exploits previously compromised credentials that are posted and sold on the dark web. "Attackers can utilize this tactic, also called 'credential stuffing,' to easily gain entry because it relies on people reusing passwords and usernames across sites," Microsoft explains.

Legacy and unsecured authentication protocols are a problem because they can't enforce multi-factor authentication. Attackers are also focussing on the REST API, says DART. Top applications targeted include Exchange ActiveSync, IMAP, POP3, SMTP Auth, and Exchange Autodiscover.

"Recently, DART has seen an uptick in cloud administrator accounts being targeted in password spray attacks," Microsoft notes.

Extra care should also be taken when configuring security controls for roles such as security admins, Exchange service admins, Global admins, Conditional Access admins, SharePoint admins, Helpdesk admins, Billing admins, User admins, Authentication admins, and Company admins. High-profile identities such as C-level execs or specific roles with access to sensitive data are also popular targets, says Microsoft.

Microsoft this [week warned that the SolarWinds hackers, a.k.a. Nobelium](#), were employing [password spray attacks on new targets](#), primarily against managed service providers that have been delegated admin access by upstream customers.

Microsoft found that Nobelium was "targeting privileged accounts of service providers to move laterally in cloud environments, leveraging the trusted relationships to gain access to downstream customers and enable further attacks or access targeted systems."

[The attacks are not the result of a product security vulnerability](#), Microsoft stressed, "but rather a continuation of Nobelium's... dynamic toolkit that includes sophisticated malware, password sprays, supply chain attacks, token theft, API abuse, and spear phishing to compromise user accounts and leverage the access of those accounts."

DART offers some handy tips to help shape the course of an investigation, such as determining whether the spray attack was successful on at least one account, determining which users were affected, and whether admin accounts were compromised.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Suspected Russia disinformation campaign
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/secondary-infektion-russia-disinformation-sweden/
GIST	<p>A suspected Russian disinformation campaign used manipulated images and fabricated internet personas to promote false narratives online in an effort to sow mistrust in Sweden and Europe, according to new findings.</p> <p>The propaganda effort known as Secondary Infektion is “highly likely” behind an effort that involved a photoshopped screenshot meant to appear as if it originated on the website of Sweden’s Riksdag, the national legislature, the threat intelligence company Recorded Future said in a report published Tuesday.</p> <p>Secondary Infektion is an operation dating back at least two years, with researchers blaming the suspected Russian outfit for forging documents, stirring outrage via social media and generating negative sentiment around the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in countries such as Ukraine. Researchers have pointed to Secondary Infektion as an example of political warfare that uses digital means to try to destabilize foreign governments.</p>

In the latest case, Recorded Future investigators observed an account on a popular Swedish forum, Flashback, publishing a post about “Swedish-Ukrainian NATO membership.” The user suggested that Sweden would soon join the alliance, founded in 1949 as a Western bulwark against the Soviet Union, because “there is no country that can stand up to threats from our aggressive neighbor Russia alone.”

The same user pointed to an image of a proposal that appeared to be from Fredrik Malm – a lawmaker in Liberalna, Sweden’s Liberal People’s Party — arguing that Sweden should join NATO, along with Ukraine, “so that Sweden can benefit from NATO’s collective defense.”

The image is “almost certainly inauthentic,” Recorded Future researchers noted. The Liberalna advocates for Swedish NATO membership, though the screenshot contains a number of grammatical errors unlikely to appear in official government documents, for instance. The would-be proposal relies in part on a bill that focused on another issue entirely from Sweden joining NATO.

Additionally, forum posts meant to attract attention on the Malm letter consist of “extremely poor Swedish” that are “more likely a bad translation from another language, potentially a machine translation.”

CyberScoop could not immediately reach Malm for comment.

The fabricated political narrative did not appear to generate meaningful attention online, researchers noted. The apparent Secondary Infection effort is consistent with Moscow’s political goals, and prior Russian active measures.

Secondary Infection previously sought to influence far-right political communities in the U.S. by amplifying coronavirus-themed misinformation, falsely accusing Muslim communities for spreading COVID-19. That effort utilized self-publishing sites to try gaining traction via 4chan, a forum frequented by social media trolls, though it largely failed to gather any conversational momentum.

Operatives from [another suspected Russian effort](#), known as Ghostwriter, in [2020 forged political documents](#) that made the false suggestion that Canadian soldiers stationed in Latvia were the cause of COVID-19 infections through Eastern Europe. The narrative, which impersonated NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, was enough to earn mention in some news outlets, FireEye investigators said at the time.

“We believe that these actors will continue with false narratives and forgeries in the hope of successfully deceiving target audiences under the belief that an information warfare campaign is a low-cost, potentially high return endeavor with little to no tangible consequences,” Recorded Future said in its latest findings.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Adobe’s surprise security bulletin
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/critical-patches-adobe-security-bulletin/175825/
GIST	<p>Adobe has dropped a mammoth out-of-band security update this week, addressing 92 vulnerabilities across 14 products.</p> <p>The majority of the disclosed bugs are critical-severity problems, and most allow arbitrary code execution (ACE). Privilege escalation, denial-of-service and memory leaks/information disclosure are all well-represented, as well.</p> <p>Adobe After Effects, Animate, Audition, Bridge, Character Animator, Illustrator, InDesign, Lightroom Classic, Media Encoder, Photoshop, Prelude, Premiere Pro, Premiere Elements and the XMP Toolkit SDK all received patches.</p>

There's plenty of commonality across the advisories. For instance, the lion's share of the bugs allow access to a memory location after the end of a buffer, leading to ACE (a [type of memory issue](#) that can be exploited, like a standard buffer overflow in the worst-case scenario).

Also, almost all of the critical problems rate 7.8 on the CVSS vulnerability severity scale, except for one type. The advisory lists "NULL pointer dereference bugs causing memory leak" flaws as the most severe issues in the bunch, all rating 8.3 on the CVSS scale. These pop up in Bridge, Media Encoder, Prelude and Premiere Elements (and are *italicized*, below).

Adobe October Out-of-Band CVEs

Here's the full breakdown of the critical bugs:

After Effects:

- CVE-2021-40751, CVE-2021-40752, CVE-2021-40753, CVE-2021-40754, CVE-2021-40755, CVE-2021-40757, CVE-2021-40758, CVE-2021-40759, CVE-2021-40760 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Animate:

- CVE-2021-40733, CVE-2021-42266, CVE-2021-42267 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42268 (NULL Pointer Dereference/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42269 (Use After Free/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42270, CVE-2021-42271, CVE-2021-42272, CVE-2021-42524 (Out-of-Bounds Write/ACE)

Audition:

- CVE-2021-40734, CVE-2021-40735, CVE-2021-40736, CVE-2021-40738, CVE-2021-40739, CVE-2021-40740 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Bridge:

- CVE-2021-40750 (*NULL Pointer Dereference/memory leak*)
- CVE-2021-42533 (Double Free/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42722, CVE-2021-42720, CVE-2021-42719 (Out-of-Bounds Read/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42728 (Buffer Overflow/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42724, CVE-2021-42729, CVE-2021-42730 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Character Animator:

- CVE-2021-40763, CVE-2021-40764, CVE-2021-40765 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Illustrator:

- CVE-2021-40718 (Out-of-Bounds Read/memory leak)
- CVE-2021-40746 (Out-of-Bounds Read/ACE)

InDesign:

- CVE-2021-42732 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42731 (Buffer Overflow/ACE)

Lightroom Classic:

- CVE-2021-40776 (Creation of Temporary File in Directory with Incorrect Permissions/privilege escalation)

Media Encoder:

- CVE-2021-40778 (*NULL Pointer Dereference/memory leak*)
- CVE-2021-40777, CVE-2021-40779, CVE-2021-40780 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Photoshop:

- CVE-2021-42735 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)
- CVE-2021-42736 (Buffer Overflow/ACE)

Prelude:

- CVE-2021-40773 (*NULL Pointer Dereference/memory leak*)
- CVE-2021-42733 (Improper Input Validation/ACE)

- CVE-2021-40775, CVE-2021-42738, CVE-2021-42737, CVE-2021-40772, CVE-2021-40771 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Premiere Elements:

- CVE-2021-40785 (*NULL Pointer Dereference/memory leak*)
- CVE-2021-40786, CVE-2021-40787, CVE-2021-42526, CVE-2021-42527 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

Premiere Pro:

- CVE-2021-40792, CVE-2021-40793, CVE-2021-40794 (Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer/ACE)

XMP Toolkit SDK:

- CVE-2021-42529, CVE-2021-42530, CVE-2021-42531, CVE-2021-42532 (Stack-Based Buffer Overflow/ACE)

This bulletin was prompted by findings from two teams that deserve busy-beaver awards: Adobe variously credited researchers from TopSec Alpha Team and Trend Micro's Zero-Day Initiative (ZDI) for most of the bugs, except for CVE-2021-40746 in Illustrator, credited to "Tmgr." This could also explain some of the commonalities in the bulletins.

"Of the patches released by Adobe, nine of these came through the ZDI program," Dustin Childs of ZDI told Threatpost. "Most of these are simple file-parsing bugs, but there are a couple of critical-rated out-of-bounds (OOB) write bugs as well. For these, the vulnerability results from the lack of proper validation of user-supplied data, which can result in a write past the end of an allocated structure. An attacker can leverage these bugs to execute code in the context of the current process."

The fixes come two weeks after Adobe released its normal monthly Patch Tuesday patches. A company spokesperson characterized the release as "planned" rather than an emergency response – and indeed, Adobe said in [its advisories](#) that there's no evidence that any of the bugs are being exploited in the wild.

"While we strive to release regularly scheduled updates on Patch Tuesday, occasionally these regularly scheduled security updates are released on non-Patch Tuesday dates," a company spokesperson told [the Register](#).

Of note: The advisory for Bridge is listed as priority 2 for patching, which in Adobe [parlance](#) means that the product has historically been at elevated risk for exploitation, so it comes with a recommendation that administrators patch within 30 days. The other advisories are priority 3, which is the lowest risk level, meaning that administrators can patch "at their discretion."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/28 'Simple but remarkable' malware loader
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2021/10/new-wslink-malware-loader-runs-as.html
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity researchers on Wednesday took the wraps off a "simple yet remarkable" malware loader for malicious Windows binaries targeting Central Europe, North America and the Middle East.</p> <p>Codenamed "Wslink" by ESET, this previously undocumented malware stands apart from the rest in that it runs as a server and executes received modules in memory. There are no specifics available on the initial compromise vector and there are no code or operational overlaps that tie this tool to a known threat actor group.</p> <p>The Slovak cybersecurity firm noted that it has seen only a handful of detections in the past two years, suggesting that it could be used in highly-targeted cyber infiltrations.</p> <p>Wslink is designed to run as a service and can accept encrypted portal executable (PE) files from a specific IP address, which is then decrypted and loaded into memory prior to the execution. To achieve this, the client (i.e., the victim) and the server perform a handshake that involves the exchange of cryptographic keys necessary to encrypt the modules using AES.</p>

	<p>"Interestingly, the modules reuse the loader's functions for communication, keys and sockets; hence they do not have to initiate new outbound connections," ESET researcher Vladislav Hřčka said. "Wslink additionally features a well-developed cryptographic protocol to protect the exchanged data."</p> <p>The findings come as researchers from Zscaler and Cisco Talos disclosed yet another malware loader called SQUIRREL WAFFLE that's distributed via spam email campaigns to deploy Qakbot and Cobalt Strike on compromised systems.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Breach ripple effect exponential damage
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/breach/breach-ripple-effect-leads-to-exponentially-greater-financial-damage
GIST	<p>A cyber-intrusion involving multiple players will create 13 times more financial damage than may be caused by even “the worst single-party breach,” according to new research, which hits highly regularly like financial institutions particularly hard.</p> <p>Mastercard company RiskRecon and Cyentia Institute released a joint study dubbed “Ripples Across the Risk Surface,” which was born of analyzing details from more than 800 multi-party breaches over the past decade. The findings demonstrated how “the waves of impact from a security incident at a single organization can spread across industries and other individual organizations,” according to the release. The concept of security risk spread is often referred to as “a ripple effect.” (RiskRecon and Cyentia released a previous report on the same issues in 2019. Since then, in this post-pandemic world, these ripple effect attacks and their damage has grown exponentially.)</p> <p>“The idea of the 'ripple effect' provides a way to understand why financial damage from breaches is increasing,” said Rafael DeLeon, senior vice president at Ncontracts, and a former bank examiner with the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency for three decades. “One breach affects at least 10 other companies, and when an organization serves the public the way banks and credit unions do, it also impacts individuals...The impact becomes exponential.”</p> <p>When a breach attack affects one or two organizations — especially financial institutions or other businesses in highly regulated industries, which hold oodles of sensitive information — it can be bad. But, according to the research from RiskRecon and Cyentia, the average ‘ripple event’ typically impacts 10 other businesses beyond the initial target. A larger ripple event can affect more than 100 downstream firms.</p> <p>“The ripple effect described in RiskRecon’s report is something we have been witnessing for years,” said Etay Maor, senior director of security strategy for Cato Networks. “Third-party risk is one of the major topics discussed by the security industry, precisely because of the interconnectivity between businesses.”</p> <p>Given the financial industry’s existing (and growing) dependence on third parties, this could be a difficult challenge to overcome. Meanwhile, ripple breaches are increasing roughly 20 percent per year, according to the report.</p> <p>Kevin Kerr, lead security principal consultant for Trustwave, pointed to SolarWinds — where a trusted entity passed malware on to unsuspecting users of the software, the most recent of which was Denmark’s central bank. Other recent high-profile breaches fit the same bill.</p> <p>“The financial impact to SolarWinds was significant, but who knows the actual financial impact to the organizations that had to shut down capabilities; where it impacted impacted system availability, [and required them to] remediate, and rebuild,” Kerry said. “Right now, there is no centralized way to measure multi-party breach impact in costs, reputations, contracts. And each affected organization would measure that impact differently.”</p>

	<p>Indeed, software vulnerabilities present a key entry for bad actors perpetrating these kinds of attacks, according to Jared Ablon, founder and president of HackEDU.</p> <p>“The negative consequences for the financial industry typically include reputational damage and even civil lawsuits involving CISOs or other key executives,” he said. “Companies that develop software need to stay vigilant in order to mitigate these risks.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Healthcare faces Covid-induced triple threat
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/healthcare-faces-covid-induced-triple-threat-as-cyber-awareness-peaks
GIST	<p>A shift has occurred in the healthcare sector over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, pressing the limits of what providers can accomplish under the most overwhelming circumstances, and not just in terms of patient care.</p> <p>Rapid tech adoptions to support the pandemic response were quickly met with equal force by cyberattacks, hell-bent on turning a profit on weakened systems. But as a steady number of healthcare providers fell victim to attacks that led many into weeks of downtime procedures, the media coverage has helped to raise awareness on the inevitable risk to patient safety.</p> <p>In fact, cyber awareness in healthcare is at an all-time high, with a dramatic focus and understanding that cyber risk is not just an IT issue, John Riggi, American Hospital Association senior advisor for cybersecurity and risk advisory, explained to SC Media. There’s an overall understanding with most leadership “that cyber risk is really an enterprise risk issue.”</p> <p>Cybersecurity and security incidents impact “every function in the organization, while every function in the organization has the ability to either cause cyber risk or help mitigate it,” said Riggi. “Hospitals and health systems, and their boards, right now rank cyber risk within their top three enterprise risk issues.”</p> <p>“For many of them, it’s the No. 1 concern,” he added. “That’s the good news.” The bad news is that cyberattacks are pummeling the healthcare sector, as seen with near-daily front page reports on ongoing incidents.</p> <p>COVID-19 and the ongoing pandemic response are adding to these concerns and security challenges. The response has further fueled digital innovation within healthcare and provider environments, creating new technologically complex systems and increases in remote care or work.</p> <p>In short, there is no longer a perimeter or one firewall able to protect all healthcare assets or the environment, overall, he explained. “The endpoints are everywhere. So even though they have more attention focused on [cybersecurity], there is probably less confidence in their ability to deal with the increased threat.”</p> <p>Recent Shred-it research supports Riggi’s theory, which found that 42% of providers may not be prepared to handle a security incident. The College of Healthcare Information Management Executives and Association for Executives in Healthcare Information Security previously reported that the majority of healthcare entities experienced a security incident in the last year.</p> <p>Of those, 30% faced a system or electronic health record outage, with another 15% reporting a patient safety incident tied to a cyber event, and 10% were forced to divert patients to nearby healthcare settings as a result of cyberattack-related outages.</p> <p>“Quite frankly, healthcare, fortunately and unfortunately, understands cybersecurity as a major strategic risk issue — because they’ve been attacked so much and because people’s lives depend on it,” said Riggi. “We’ve seen ambulances diverted, surgeries being canceled.”</p>

“The pipeline attack this spring demonstrated to other sectors that they are critical infrastructure for a reason: they’re critical to the U.S. economy, to public health and safety,” he added.

Healthcare’s triple threat

The pandemic exacerbated ongoing cybersecurity challenges within the healthcare sector. Providers are now facing a “COVID-19-induced cyber triple threat: a vastly expanded attack surface and dramatically increased attacks, ransomware attacks that also employ data theft as another layer of extortion, and reduced resources” stemming from the pandemic.

Many small providers are struggling to close some of the major security gaps and “are absolutely feeling the pressure right now,” which is a direct result of the pandemic. They’ve had to divert resources and shift their attention to the response, including shuffling their wards and ICU beds.

Riggi added they’ve also had to deal with other environmental factors as the pandemic created a much broader remote work environment. Some non-clinicians are working remotely in many instances. There’s also been a tremendous expansion of telehealth and telemedicine, as well as an overall reliance on remote technologies and services, such as the cloud.

The pandemic and related environmental shifts in healthcare “vastly expanded what we call the attack surface.”

“The remote extension of remote technologies and a wide adoption and application of technologies was actually very important and the right thing to do to respond to emergency situations such as a pandemic, but it did create this vastly expanded attack surface,” he said.

“Now our adversaries, from the start of the pandemic, have been consistently targeting and consistently exploited,” Riggi added.

Healthcare has a confluence of factors, which creates a perfect storm for increased cyber threats, expanded attacks or more attacks, and fewer human financial and technical resources to deal with it.

Overall, [the financial strain placed on hospitals](#), especially smaller hospitals, has resulted in revenue pressures and staffing shortages, with both the clinical and trained-cybersecurity workforce.

Healthcare “also has a greater understanding that a lot of the cyber risks that an organization has actually absorbed comes from third parties,” he continued. “Some of the largest cyber breaches we’ve seen this year, and last year, in terms of the number of records stolen, were not stolen from the covered entities: they were stolen from the business associates, that the provider had to turn the records over to for business reasons.”

“There are mission-critical dependencies the provider has, for instance: certain medical devices may require access to a third-party cloud service for them to operate,” said Riggi. “Understanding third-party risk, its implications for patient care services and business operations, for both hospitals and health systems, and healthcare overall.”

Data show that the vast majority of the largest healthcare data breaches both in 2020 [and 2021 were caused by third-party vendors](#), while recent reports confirm the sector is struggling to close these major gaps.

What then should be the key focus?

To be blunt, providers must deal with what’s directly in front of them at the moment, the nearest threat, the tactical threat, which can impose direct harm to patient lives, explained Riggi.

At the moment, that is the “highly disruptive ransomware attacks, which have, in fact, been disrupting care delivery services and risking patient safety.” Some of the most high profile attacks that affected large systems had a direct regional, state, and nationwide impact.

“AHA is most concerned about those at the moment because they’re posing a direct, immediate threat to patient care delivery and patient safety,” said Riggi. “There is a tremendous, residual impact because it’s not just the organizations affected [by these attacks], it’s all of the surrounding providers, as well.”

“There’s a cascading effect,” he continued. “We’ve seen this in some of the attacks on larger entities that all the smaller hospitals rely on, as well as the vendors or providers, for lab results or cancer treatments that can’t serve those patients because the services are disrupted during the attack.”

Ransomware can cause a lot of collateral impact across the region when one major provider gets hit with a ransomware attack and the ambulances and patients are diverted to other hospitals, which may already be full with COVID-19 patients.

As detailed in a [July 22](#) congressional hearing, the May cyberattack on Scripps Health that led to a month of network downtime, led to overwhelmed emergency departments at local hospitals, such as the University of California San Diego Health. That same hearing confirmed healthcare is just not prepared to handle ransomware attacks at the current pace of activity.

What’s more, as soon as providers are exposed, they have civil and regulatory obligations to fulfill, explained Riggi. “This is what has the chilling effect on hospitals and really all healthcare providers to be fully transparent with the government.”

To pare down some of the complexity of the healthcare environment, Riggi urged providers to ensure they have means and processes in place able to continuously map and monitor the environment, which can provide a better understanding to the technical environment — including “what normal or baseline network activity looks like.”

This information can “then help to identify abnormal and malicious traffic flow,” he added.

Another priority must be established processes to maintain an accurate dynamic inventory of data, devices (including all IoT devices) and applications, which will “allow for the efficient application of patches to mitigate identified vulnerabilities within devices and applications and ensure the proper controls are in place to protect the privacy and security of sensitive data sets.”

It’s also “incumbent” that leadership and technical staff rely on the “vast amount of free cyber threat intelligence and information” provided by government agencies, AHA and other stakeholder groups, the Department of Health and Human Services, and threat sharing channels. The FBI-sponsored InfraGard program is ideal for cyber threat information exchange.

“Regular cyber threat briefings with leadership and staff, perhaps as a recurring agenda item at leadership and staff meetings, is a good way to establish a consistent cadence of the briefings and continuous reinforcement of cyber awareness,” said Riggi.

While it’s impossible to eliminate risk, it’s also imperative for healthcare organizations to exhaust all avenues when securing the healthcare environment. [NIST provides more than 400 controls](#) that are routinely updated, which should be the standard used by all healthcare security teams.

If attackers relentlessly targeted healthcare during a global pandemic, they clearly won’t let up once everything is back to normal. As awareness is at its high, there’s no longer an excuse for failing to act.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/28 Small businesses pay to recover in breach
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/small-businesses-paying-1m-recover/
GIST	Over half (58%) of US small businesses have suffered a security or data breach, with most paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to cover the costs, according to a new study from the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC).

According to the US Small Business Administration, there are nearly 32 million businesses with fewer than 500 employees. To find out more about how they're impacted by cyber-attacks, the ITRC polled 417 small business owners.

The non-profit's [2021 Business Aftermath Report](#) revealed that many suffer a serious business impact from breaches.

Of those hit by a breach, three-quarters experienced at least two, and a third said they had suffered at least three incidents.

Over two-fifths (44%) spent \$250,000-\$500,000 to cover the costs of the breach, while 16% said they were forced to fork out between \$500,000-\$1m.

Unsurprisingly, over a third (36%) admitted that this outlay put their business into debt, while a similar number (34%) said they had to dip into cash reserves to bail themselves out. A further 15% were forced to reduce headcount as a result.

The majority of respondents said it took them several years to recover from a breach.

"Behind all of these statistics are people. The resources stolen by cyber-criminals are the same resources needed to sustain or grow a business to keep families safe, healthy and financially secure," said ITRC president and CEO, Eva Velasquez.

"These identity crimes are not just costing small businesses and solopreneurs a lot of money. It is also taking them a long time to put their business back on a path to growth."

Two-fifths (42%) of respondents claimed it took 1-2 years to get back to normal after a breach, while for over a quarter (28%), the road to recovery lasted 3-5 years.

Interestingly, while 40% of attacks were traced to external threat actors, over a third (35%) were caused by malicious employees and contractors, the report found.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Free decryptor for Babuk ransomware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/babuk-ransomware-decryptor-released-to-recover-files-for-free/
GIST	<p>Czech cybersecurity software firm Avast has created and released a decryption tool to help Babuk ransomware victims recover their files for free.</p> <p>According to Avast Threat Labs, the Babuk decryptor was created using leaked source code and decryption keys.</p> <p>The free decryptor can be used by Babuk victims who had their files encrypted using the following extensions: .babuk, .babyk, .doydo.</p> <p>Babuk ransomware victims can download the decryption tool from Avast's servers and decrypt entire partitions at once using instructions displayed within the decryptor's user interface.</p> <p>Ransomware and decryption keys leak</p> <p>Babuk gang's full ransomware source code was leaked on a Russian-speaking hacking forum last month by a threat actor claiming to be a member of the ransomware group.</p>

The decision to leak the code was motivated by the alleged Babuk member by his terminal cancer condition. He said in his leak post that he decided to release the source code while they have to "live like a human."

The shared archive contained different Visual Studio Babuk ransomware projects for VMware ESXi, NAS, and Windows encryptors, with the Windows folder contains the complete source code for the Windows encryptor, decryptor, and what looked like private and public key generators.

Included in the leak were also encryptors and decryptors compiled for specific victims of the ransomware gang.

After the leak, Emsisoft CTO and ransomware expert [Fabian Wosar](#) told BleepingComputer that the source code is legitimate and that the archive may also contain decryption keys for past victims.

Babuk's troubled history

[Babuk Locker](#), also known as Babyk and Babuk, is a ransomware operation that [launched at the beginning of 2021](#) when it started targeting businesses to steal and encrypt their data as part of double-extortion attacks.

After their attack on [the Washington DC's Metropolitan Police Department](#) (MPD) they landed in U.S. law enforcement's cross hairs and claimed to have shut down their operation after beginning to feel the heat.

After this attack, the gang's 'Admin' allegedly wanted to leak the stolen MPD data online for publicity, while the other members were against it.

Following this, Babuk members splintered off, with the original admin launching the Ramp cybercrime forum and the others relaunching the ransomware under the Babuk V2 name, continuing to target and encrypt victims ever since.

Right after the Ramp cybercrime forum's launch, it was targeted by a series of DDoS attacks that eventually led to the site becoming unusable.

While the Babuk Admin blamed his former partners for third incident, the Babuk V2 team told BleepingComputer that they were not behind the attacks.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Free decryptor AtomSilo, LockFile victims
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/free-decryptor-released-for-atom-silo-and-lockfile-ransomware/
GIST	<p>Avast has just released a decryption tool that will help AtomSilo and LockFile ransomware victims recover some of their files for free without having to pay a ransom.</p> <p>Avast released another decryption tool earlier today to help Babuk ransomware victims recover their files for free.</p> <p>As the Czech cybersecurity software firm explained, this decryptor may not be able to decrypt files with unknown, proprietary, or with no format at all.</p> <p>"During the decryption process, the Avast AtomSilo decryptor relies on a known file format in order to verify that the file was successfully decrypted. For that reason, some files may not be decrypted," Avast's Threat Intelligence Team said.</p> <p>The decryptor works for both ransomware strains because they are very similar, even though the groups deploying them on victims' networks use different attack tactics.</p>

	<p>Avast Threat Labs said this ransomware decryptor was created in collaboration with RE - CERT malware analyst Jiří Vinopal, who found a weakness in the AtomSilo ransomware earlier this month.</p> <p>BleepingComputer tested the tool and recovered files encrypted with an Atom Silo sample using Avast's free decryptor.</p> <p>The LockFile ransomware operation was first seen in July 2021 after the gang was spotted taking over Windows domains and encrypting devices after exploiting servers unpatched against the ProxyShell and PetitPotam vulnerabilities.</p> <p>When encrypting files, LockFile ransomware will append the .lockfile extension to the encrypted files' names and drop ransom notes named using the '[victim_name]-LOCKFILE-README.hta' format.</p> <p>Of particular interest is that LockFile's color scheme and ransom note layout are very similar to the LockBit ransomware. However, there does not appear to be any relation between the two groups.</p> <p>Atom Silo is a newly spotted ransomware gang whose operators have recently targeted Confluence Server and Data Center servers vulnerable against a now patched and actively exploited bug.</p> <p>The ransomware used by Atom Silo is almost identical to LockFile, according to SophosLabs researchers. However, Atom Silo operators use novel techniques that make it extremely difficult to investigate their attacks, including side-loading malicious dynamic-link libraries that disrupt endpoint protection solutions.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Android spyware apps target Israel
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/android-spyware-apps-target-israel-in-three-year-long-campaign/
GIST	<p>A set of seemingly innocuous Android apps have been infecting Israeli users with spyware since 2018, and the campaign continues to this day.</p> <p>The spyware-laden apps were discovered by researchers at Qihoo 360 who found various apps disguised as social applications, Threema, Al-Aqsa Radio, Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem Guide, PDF viewer, Wire, and other applications.</p> <p>The most abused app is one pretending to be Threema, an end-to-end encrypted instant messaging application.</p> <p>The researchers believe the initial vector for these apps is a Facebook post or WhatsApp message that points victims to a website that hosts the APK and offers it for download.</p> <p>In some cases, the messages contain a Google Drive link to a supposedly important classified PDF document.</p> <p>The target is then urged to download an APK that pretends to be the mobile version of Adobe Reader, but which is actually spyware.</p> <p>Extensive spyware set</p> <p>The researchers analyzed various samples and found that the attackers use a wide range of different commodity malware for these attacks, including SpyNote, Mobihok, WH-RAT, and 888RAT.</p> <p>These are all commercial spyware with powerful functionality, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ file exfiltration ▪ call recording ▪ location tracking ▪ keylogging

- photo and video capturing
- real-time recording
- clipboard management
- phishing
- shell command execution

In fewer cases, Metasploit and EsecretRAT were found in the APKs. On both occasions, the actors had implemented additional custom code on top of the open-source tools.

EsecretRAT is based on ChatApp and is a novel spyware tool capable of exfiltrating contact lists, SMS, IMEI, location info, IP address, and all photos stored in the device.

Signs of Hamas hackers

Qihoo 360 believes that ‘APT-C-23’, a Hamas-backed group, is behind the attacks and has been repeatedly linked with past Israel-targeting campaigns.

In October 2020, they were uncovered for using Android spyware [disguised as Threema](#) and Telegram against devices in Israel.

A few months earlier, they baited Israeli soldiers through custom spyware apps made to appear as legit [dating apps](#).

For this campaign, which has been going on for three years, the researchers note that the attribution may be thin, but the similarities with previous APT-C-23 campaigns are strong.

If you have downloaded Threema, Telegram, PDF viewer, Al-Aqsa Radio, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Jerusalem Guide from any site other than the Google Play Store, it is advised that you remove the app immediately and scan your device with an antivirus program.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/28 German students' data exposed; API flaw
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/sensitive-data-of-400-000-german-students-exposed-by-api-flaw/
GIST	<p>Approximately 400,000 users of Scoolio, a student community app widely used in Germany, had sensitive information exposed due to an API flaw in the platform.</p> <p>Lilith Wittmann, a security researcher from the IT security collective “Zerforschung” discovered the bug and immediately disclosed their findings to the Scoolio team.</p> <p>A “student” business</p> <p>Soolio is a German student community app that aims to build better time management skills, tutoring, homework planning, and group chats to network with peers. The app also allows companies to network with students to share job openings or internship opportunities.</p> <p>Soolio makes money by collecting data generated through these tools and features and then monetizing it with targeted advertising. However, Soolio states that they do not collect or share any information from students without their consent.</p> <p>To build student membership, Soolio has partnered with schools around Germany to use their platform as a remote teaching assistance tool for file exchanges or remote digital homework collection.</p> <p>Its very development was financially backed by three state-owned investment groups, namely SIB Innovations - und Beteiligungsgesellschaft mbH, Technologiegründerfonds Sachsen, and Kreissparkasse Bautzen.</p>

Due to the partnerships and government backings, many students use the app as a standard tool in their classes.

Data exposed by leaky API

In Zerforschung's report, Wittmann explains how she exploited Scoolio API flaws to retrieve extremely sensitive data for any user ID used on the app.

The exposed personal data includes:

- User nickname
- User and parent email addresses
- GPS location at which the app was last opened
- Name of school and class
- Interests
- UUID details
- Personality traits (origin, religion, sexuality)

While Scoolio states that 1.8 million people use their app, the researcher believes that the actual number is closer to 400,000 based on how user ids are created.

"We cannot say exactly how many students are affected. Because scoolio artificially inflates its user numbers by creating accounts without asking: As soon as you download the app and open it once, an empty profile with a UUID is generated - regardless of whether you actually want to create a user account," explains the [Zerforschung report](#).

Fix released after thirty days

Zerforschung states that they disclosed the flaw to Scoolio on September 21, 2021, but it took the software developer until October 25, 2021 to deploy a patch.

However, due to the simplicity of the fix and the sensitive nature of the exposed data, Wittmann believes the fix should have been released more quickly.

"I would like to thank Ms. Wittmann for the information and the SDS for the exchange and thank you for your feedback on our security measures," Danny Roller, CEO and Founder of the Scoolio app, shared in a statement.

"Fortunately, after extensive testing, we can confirm that No user data was intercepted by third parties prior to the investigation by Ms. Wittmann and we have successfully closed the gaps found."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Attacks ramp up on web APIs
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/cybercriminals-ramp-up-attacks-on-web-apis
GIST	<p>Attacks on Web applications continue to grow, with the majority of malicious activity focused on Web application programming interfaces, or Web APIs, researchers report.</p> <p>The findings, released Oct. 27 by Internet security firm Akamai, call out the growing attack surface posed by Web APIs. Researchers don't actually differentiate between attacks on Web applications and attacks specifically using Web APIs but maintain that the growing attacks on Web applications are mainly coming through the APIs exposed by application servers. The top three Web attack vectors — SQL injection, local file inclusion, and cross-site scripting — account for nearly 95% of all Web attacks and often are carried out through APIs, according to Akamai's report.</p> <p>While developers are quickly adopting APIs as a way of architecting mobile, Web, and cloud applications, they don't always consider security, says Akamai security researcher Steve Ragan.</p>

"The lessons that Web application security [professionals] learned a decade ago, we are now seeing them in API security," he says. "APIs are meant to increase the availability and access at scale. They are easy to deploy, so developers really love to tack on APIs when they can, [but] because APIs are dominating our lives, it is important to pay attention to their security."

The growing attack surface area of Web APIs is not going unnoticed. Market research firm Gartner maintains that 90% of Web applications will be more vulnerable to attacks through exposed APIs than through the user interface, [according to Akamai's report](#). Another report, published by [API security firm Salt Labs](#), says overall API traffic increased by more than 140% in the first half of the year, but malicious API traffic grew much faster, by nearly 350%.

The growing use of Web APIs by attackers led the Open Web Application Security Project (OWASP) to [release a list of the Top 10 API security issues in 2019](#). In many ways, the issues on this list mirror those on the better-known OWASP Top 10 Web Application Security Risks list.

"The [Top 10 API Security list] purports to address the 'unique vulnerabilities and security risks' of APIs, but look closely and you'll see all of the same web vulnerabilities, in a slightly different order, described with slightly different words," Chris Eng, chief research officer for software security firm Veracode, said in an essay in the report. "We're making all the same mistakes with API security that we made with web security 20 years ago."

The Akamai report documents a slow increase in daily Web application attacks over the last 18 months, with the month of June 2021 showing a more significant peak, exceeding 113 million attacks in a single day. In addition, the average number of credential-abuse attacks, in which the attacker attempts to log in using stolen or guessable credentials, has also tripled over the past 18 months. Many of those attacks could be conducted through an application's API.

"Going forward, you are going to see APIs as the first scans, when they are looking for entry into corporate networks," Ragan says. "When they do credential stuffing attacks, they are using the APIs, and a lot of that stuff is not rate-limited, so you are seeing unlimited guesses."

Surveys have shown developers are more focused on getting APIs working than making sure the interfaces are secure, according to Akamai's report. About half of software development teams regularly push out code known to have vulnerabilities, with half pointing to a need to meet a critical deadline and an expectation that they would later patch the feature, [according to a report by the Enterprise Strategy Group sponsored by Veracode](#).

"Don't ignore the vulnerabilities, don't ignore the testing, don't hardcode passwords and tokens," Ragan says. "All of those basics, you are still seeing those problems. We are seeing a lot of the problems now that we saw years ago, and it is completely avoidable."

In addition to attacks targeting APIs and Web applications, Akamai also saw credential stuffing attacks rise to an average of about 800 million fraudulent login attempts per day in the first half of 2021, with a handful of days seeing 1 billion login attempts.

Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks grew as well: Akamai recorded 190 DDoS events in a single day in January, but attacks dropped off in June.

Attackers targeted networks and systems in the United States about six times as much as targets in the second most targeted nation, the United Kingdom. However, the US is also the source of the most attacks, accounting for four times the volume of attacks than the second most common source, Russia.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Cybercriminals claim hack of NRA
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/cybercriminals-claim-hacked-nra-rcna3929?web_view=true

GIST	<p>A notorious Russian cybercriminal group has posted what appear to be National Rifle Association files to the dark web.</p> <p>The group, known as Grief, posted 13 files to its website Wednesday and claimed to have hacked the NRA. It is threatening to release more of the files if not paid, though it did not publicly state how much.</p> <p>Like many ransomware gangs, Grief often posts a handful files stolen from a victim in an efforts to spur a ransom payment.</p> <p>While paying any ransomware hacker is a risk, Grief is particularly tricky. Cybersecurity experts widely believe Grief is a rebranded effort by a group of Russian cybercriminals who previously used the nickname Evil Corp, which is currently under sanctions by the U.S. Treasury Department.</p> <p>"It's the same group," said Allan Liska, a ransomware analyst at the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future.</p> <p>The NRA didn't respond when reached for comment. It did, however, post a tweet saying that "does not discuss matters relating to its physical or electronic security," and that the organization "takes extraordinary measures to protect information regarding its members, donors, and operations."</p> <p>Grief, though a criminal group, isn't known for bluffing when it claims an organization was a victim, said Brett Callow, who tracks ransomware groups at the cybersecurity company Emsisoft.</p> <p>"I'm not aware of any incidents in which Grief/Evil Corp has attempted to take credit for other operations' attacks," Callow said.</p> <p>Most of the files viewed by NBC News relate to NRA grants. They include blank grant proposal forms, a list of recent grant recipients, an email to a recent grant winner earlier this month, as well as a W-9 form. The leak also includes the minutes from a Sept. 24 NRA teleconference meeting.</p> <p>Cybercriminals, many of them based in and near Russia, have made ransomware a constant threat in recent years, regularly hacking businesses, schools, police departments and various other institutions. While the White House has taken several steps to improve U.S. defenses, ransomware is still a lucrative criminal enterprise. Last year, it cost nearly \$75 billion in damages worldwide, Emsisoft found.</p> <p>Jen Easterly, the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, said earlier this month that Russian ransomware hackers have yet to make "any significant, material changes" to their frequent attacks against American businesses.</p> <p>On Friday, after the FBI reportedly took down one major ransomware group, several others vowed retaliation and to punish the U.S.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Automotive parts manufacture cyberattack
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/workers-sent-home-after-ransomware-attack-on-major-automotive-parts-manufacturer/
GIST	<p>German multinational company Eberspächer Group has sent a part of its factory workforce home on paid leave while its management and IT teams are dealing with a ransomware attack that crippled its IT systems over the weekend.</p> <p>The Eberspächer Group currently employs more than 10,000 workers, operates production plants in 80 locations across 28 countries, and is known for building air conditioning, heating, and exhaust systems, which it supplies to almost all of today's top car brands.</p> <p>"Eberspächer Group was the target of an organized cyberattack. The IT infrastructure is affected," the company said in a message posted on its website on Monday [archived].</p>

“To protect our customers, employees and partners, the necessary steps were taken immediately to counter the attack with targeted measures,” Eberspächer added.

The company’s official websites, email systems, office networks, customer portals, and production systems were taken down in the aftermath of the attack, which was detected on Sunday morning. Without the ability to coordinate production and manage customer orders, the company has told some of its factory workforces to stay at home on paid leave while it deals with the outage.

“Our employees are at home with a salary and we keep them updated on the situation,” Marie Wiström, CEO of Eberspächer’s Swedish subsidiary, [told SVT](#), the Swedish national public television broadcaster. Workers were also told to stay home in Germany, according to German news outlet [SR](#), and Romania, The Record has learned.

Incident investigated as “computer sabotage and attempted blackmail”

While the company did not go into the finer points of the cyberattack that hit its systems over the weekend, German auto news site [Automobilwoche](#) reported that a spokeswoman for the Stuttgart public prosecutor’s office said the incident is being investigated as a case of “computer sabotage and attempted blackmail.”

A spokesperson for the Eberspächer Group could not be reached via phone or email as these systems are still down at the time of writing.

However, the company announced on Twitter that the Easy Start Web portal, which allows vehicle owners to start Eberspächer heaters remotely, is now back online.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Industries most hit by ransomware
SOURCE	https://betanews.com/2021/10/27/revealing-industries-most-hit-by-ransomware/
GIST	<p>New research from cloud encryption specialist NordLocker looks at which industries are the most popular targets for ransomware, analyzing 1,200 companies hit by 10 infamous ransomware gangs in 2020 and 2021.</p> <p>Perhaps surprisingly the construction sector tops the list with 93 attacks, followed by manufacturing on 86, finance on 69, healthcare on 65, and with education rounding out the top five on 63.</p> <p>Among the hacked companies discovered by NordLocker's research, are not only large organizations, such as a global hotel chain, an automotive conglomerate, or a world-wide clothing brand, but also small family-owned and operated businesses like an Italian restaurant or a local dental clinic.</p> <p>"It is surprising how many companies still take cybersecurity for granted, 'inviting' hackers to exploit their vulnerabilities," says Oliver Noble, cybersecurity expert at NordLocker. "When successfully attacked, companies get all their employee data, customer details, client agreements, patents, and other valuable business information inaccessible and threatened to be stolen, leaked, or destroyed for good. To avoid the doomsday, i.e. having business operations put to a standstill, damaged reputation, loss of clients, tiresome legal battles, and huge fines, some organizations are left with no choice but to pay ransom to get the decryption key."</p> <p>The report also looks at the attackers, with the most prolific ransomware family being Conti, with 450 attacks to its name. REvil (210 hacks), DoppelPaymer (200), and PYSA (188) are also among the most famous and active cybercrime groups.</p> <p>The top five countries where businesses get attacked most are the US (732 cases), UK (74), Canada (62), France (58), and Germany (39).</p>

	"Internationally operating law enforcement groups work hard to shut ransomware infrastructure down," says Noble. "Just last week it was reported that a joint operation put REvil's servers offline. However, the Russian ransomware-as-a-service gang is expected to re-emerge. Ransomware is no longer what only skilled hackers are capable of. Any paying user, aka affiliate with little technical knowledge, can use the subscription-based model to employ already-developed tools to execute ransomware attacks against businesses."
Return to Top	You can read more on the research and get tips on protecting your business on the NordLocker site .

HEADLINE	10/26 Schreiber Foods victimized in cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.wisfarmer.com/story/news/2021/10/26/schreiber-foods-hit-cyberattack-plants-closed/8558252002/
GIST	<p>Milk distribution was in disarray in Wisconsin this week as one of the state's larger milk processors, Schreiber Foods, was victimized by hackers demanding a rumored \$2.5 million ransom to unlock their computer systems.</p> <p>The cyberattack on the dairy processor came just as the New York Times published a front-page article headlined "Russia restarts cyber operations, despite rebuke" – referring to Russian-linked hackers. The article, which appeared Monday, Oct. 25, 2021, outlines how "Russia's premiere intelligence agency has launched another campaign" to pierce computer networks of the U.S. government, corporations and think tanks.</p> <p>Wisconsin milk handlers and haulers reported getting calls from Schreiber on Saturday (Oct. 23) saying that the company's computer systems were down and that their plants couldn't take the milk that had been contracted to go there. Haulers and schedulers were forced to find alternate homes for milk. As of Tuesday's Wisconsin State Farmer deadline there had not yet been reports of milk having to be dumped.</p> <p>Calls to Schreiber Foods were not immediately returned.</p> <p>But one dairy source said that it may be only a matter of time before silos full of milk that can't be made into dairy products have to be disposed of.</p> <p>Schreiber Foods makes natural cheese, processed cheese, cream cheese and yogurt, is an employee-owned company headquartered in Green Bay, Wisconsin. According to the company's website, it has more than 30 locations around the world – in India, Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Mexico, Spain, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Germany and the United States.</p> <p>The company's Wisconsin plants include Richland Center, West Bend and Green Bay. The company, founded in 1945, has more than 8,000 employees.</p> <p>"Serious as hell"</p> <p>"This is serious as hell," said Pete Hardin, editor and publisher of The Milkweed, a national dairy monthly. "Schreiber is one of the nation's big marketers of dairy products, including cheese and yogurt and their supply chain extends back to many Wisconsin cheese plants.</p> <p>"On top of the supply chain and logistical headaches, the industry does not need this," Hardin said.</p> <p>Because of the cyberattack, Schreiber is unable to conduct normal ordering of inventories from its suppliers, some of whom confirmed that the hack was real. Milk is backed up at Schreiber facilities and the milk they normally would have taken into their plants ends up going on the market for "distressed" milk, Hardin added.</p> <p>"It's a lose, lose, lose scenario – the farmer, the cooperative, the cheese plant and other companies that buy ingredients from Schreiber," he said. "Maybe it's more like four or five 'loses' in that equation."</p>

Computerized milk-handling systems are involved in raw milk intake at modern dairy plants and systems are responsible for testing raw milk, determining components of that milk as well as inventory, ordering and many other functions.

“Everything is computer-controlled these days,” Hardin added. “You add up the numbers and there will be ripples statewide and nationwide that could affect retail and food service sectors as well as farmers and other milk plants.”

The hack highlights the vulnerability of dairy since the raw product is so perishable, he added.

Hack highlights vulnerability of dairy

“This is huge.”

It is huge because Schreiber is such a large dairy company. In recent years, Hardin said, the company had a market share of somewhere in the neighborhood of 75 percent of the yellow cheese that goes on fast-food burgers nationally and is a big supplier of sour cream for food service clients.

The upside Hardin added, is that Wisconsin has so many experienced and sophisticated dairy industry people that they take a “live and let live” attitude – helping others out now, knowing that one day they may need help from other industry peers.

Terry Hanson, general manager of Scenic Central Milk Producers Cooperative, confirmed that the Schreiber hack and shutdown were real and had taken place; some of his producers’ milk had to be sent to other dairy plants.

“I don’t know much other than it is real. It happened and it’s nationwide,” he told us.

There was another similar hack on a dairy plant, eight months ago that he was aware of. He questioned why companies want to put all their operations under one computerized system that makes it easier to hack.

As for the last few days, Hanson said some of the state’s dairy co-ops were most likely able to juggle their loads between their own plants but for service co-ops like Scenic Central, it was a bit more challenging.

“If it had been planned, we could have handled it a lot better. And of course it happened on the weekend which is always tough,” he said.

Hanson said it was his understanding that Schreiber would be back up and running again on Wednesday, Oct. 27. “I sure hope so,” he added.

Other ag hacks

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) lists food and agriculture as one of 16 critical infrastructure sectors. The agency is a standalone U.S. federal agency, founded in 2018, under the Department of Homeland Security’s oversight.

About a month ago, an Iowa grain cooperative was hacked by a Russian-linked hacking group “BlackMatter,” which demanded \$5.9 million to unlock its data. New Cooperative Inc., based in Fort Dodge, proactively took its systems offline to contain the threat, the co-op told The Wall Street Journal.

In that hack, compromised data included financial information, legal and executive information and the source code for a soil mapping input management tool used by the co-op.

In the food and agriculture sector, the Iowa cooperative hack followed the cyberattack on meatpacking giant JBS in May, 2021, which disabled the Brazil-based company’s beef and pork slaughterhouses in the United States, Canada and Australia. Online sources reported that in the twelve months preceding the JBS

	<p>ransomware attack, more than 40 additional attacks on food producers occurred. Some targets were as large as Molson Coors, the beer maker.</p> <p>In the JBS hack, the company said it had paid an \$11 million ransom to the cyber -criminals so that it could unlock operations in 13 of its meat processing plants and to prevent the destruction of critical data by the hackers.</p> <p>In Wisconsin, one dairy source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Wisconsin State Farmer that they knew of a hack that had hit a dairy business in Wisconsin around the time of World Dairy Expo – “and it wasn’t Schreiber.”</p>
	Return to Top

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	10/28 UAE sends 12 ex-Gitmo detainees to Yemen
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/uae-sends-12-former-guantanamo-detainees-yemen-lawyer-official-2021-10-28/
GIST	<p>ADEN, Oct 28 (Reuters) - The United Arab Emirates has sent 12 Yemenis, initially detained at the Guantanamo Bay U.S. military prison, to Yemen where they are expected to be released, a local official and a lawyer said on Thursday.</p> <p>The men were part of a group of 18 Yemenis and one Russian who were transferred from Guantanamo Bay between 2015 and 2017 to the UAE, where they remained in detention.</p> <p>They had originally been seized in Afghanistan and Pakistan following the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States. The first six were repatriated to Yemen and released in July.</p> <p>The Yemenis were all held for over a decade without charge or trial.</p> <p>An Emirati military plane carrying the 12 landed in al-Mukalla in the Yemeni southern province of Hadhramout on Wednesday, a Yemeni government official said.</p> <p>The Emirati government did not respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Abdulrahman Barman, a lawyer of the detainees, said the Yemeni government contacted the detainees' families and asked them to prepare for the release of their relatives at al-Rayan military base.</p> <p>Rayan air base has been under the control of the UAE's military since 2015, when the Gulf state and Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen to back the government against the Houthi movement.</p> <p>Barman said the six released in July had received some money from the Emirati and Yemeni governments.</p> <p>The United Nations and rights groups have urged Abu Dhabi and Washington to stop the forced repatriation of detainees to their homelands, where they could face further torture and detention.</p> <p>UN rights experts said last year the 18 detainees were "allegedly forced to sign documents consenting to their repatriation" or remain indefinitely in Emirati detention.</p> <p>Their transfer to Gulf states was part of U.S. President Barack Obama's plan to shutter the Guantanamo Bay detention centre that has drawn international condemnation.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/17 Florida man pleads guilty; terror support
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SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/florida-man-posted-bomb-making-instructions-online-for-isis-facing-up-to-15-years-in-prison
GIST	<p>A 29-year-old Florida man pleaded guilty Monday to attempting to materially support terrorism after he posted multiple documents online for ISIS terrorists with instructions on creating homemade bombs.</p> <p>Samuel Baptiste is facing up to 15 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and a lifetime of supervised release when he is sentenced in January, according to the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida.</p> <p>In November 2016, Baptiste uploaded documents entitled, "Instructions: How to Make a Homemade Pipe Bomb," "Pipe Bombs," "Improvised Explosive Devices" and "Improvised Munitions Black Book, Volume 1."</p> <p>The documents were uploaded for "persons whom he believed were acting on behalf of ISIS," according to the U.S. Attorney prosecuting the case.</p> <p>He was originally indicted in August 2018 on four counts of distributing information pertaining to explosives, one count of attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization and one count of attempting to provide material support to terrorists.</p> <p>Baptiste was previously sentenced to 80 months in prison on federal weapons charges.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/28 Taliban founder's son emerges in Kabul
SOURCE	https://www.siasat.com/taliban-founder-mullah-omars-son-mullah-yaqub-omar-makes-first-appearance-2215895/
GIST	<p>New Delhi: Mullah Yaqub Omar, the new defence minister of Afghanistan and son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, made his first appearance before the media in Kabul on Wednesday, Express Tribune reported.</p> <p>Mullah Yaqub, who heads the Taliban military commission, recently moved to Kabul from Kandahar and has close family members as his personal guards, the report said.</p> <p>He is said to be the driving force behind the capture of the entire country by the Taliban after the US announced the withdrawal of its forces.</p> <p>The security during the address was extraordinary, given Yaqub is still one of the most wanted men in the US, a local journalist told The Express Tribune. The announcement that Mullah Yaqub would address the gathering took the participants and the media personnel by surprise because nobody knew about his presence.</p> <p>Addressing the ceremony at Kabul's Shaheed Sardar Daud Hospital, Yaqub urged the wealthy segments of the Afghan society to invest in the healthcare sector so that Afghans don't have to rely on neighbours for treatment.</p> <p>He said the Taliban were in power to serve the Afghans, adding that those who have more resources should contribute towards nation-building.</p> <p>The whereabouts of Mullah Yaqub Omar, the 30-something son of Mullah Omar who has been named the militant group's caretaker defense minister, is essentially a mystery, RFE/RL said in an earlier report.</p> <p>The militant group's newly named supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, has only been seen on posters even as government appointments are attributed to him amid reports that he died a year ago, the report said.</p>

	<p>The 27-year-old son of Mullah Omar — the founder of the Taliban — grew up in Balochistan and received his religious education in Pakistan’s southwestern province as well. He moved to Kandahar for his final exams, Express Tribune reported.</p> <p>He is considered an expert in large scale operations even though at first he was not well-versed in combat. He was later appointed as the head of the military commission by the Taliban. After the appointment, he moved back to Afghanistan from Pakistan.</p> <p>According to sources, Yaqub is a close aide of Mullah Haibatullah on military operations, while he is one of the strong voices in the Taliban shura. They claim that Yaqub is “considered as a final authority” on military operations and related appointments, the report said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/28 Germany: 5 youths plan IS-inspired attack
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/five-youths-suspected-planning-islamic-state-inspired-attack-germany-2021-10-28/
GIST	<p>BERLIN, Oct 28 (Reuters) - German anti-terrorism forces on Thursday raided the homes of five young people west of the city of Bonn who were suspected of planning an attack inspired by the Islamic State militant group, prosecutors said.</p> <p>None of the five suspects - aged 16 to 22 - was arrested as judges only granted investigators search warrants given most of the suspects are minors.</p> <p>Two of the suspects are German citizens, another two are dual Russian-German nationals and one is Turkish.</p> <p>"The suspects are accused of preparing for a terrorist attack inspired by propaganda material of the Islamic State group," the Public Prosecutor's Office in the city of Duesseldorf said, adding that some 350 police officers carried out the raids.</p> <p>Investigators will analyse material confiscated during the search to use as evidence against the suspects in any possible trial.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Manchester Arena inquiry: intel not shared
SOURCE	https://news.sky.com/story/manchester-arena-inquiry-highly-relevant-pieces-of-intelligence-received-by-mi5-not-shared-with-police-before-attack-12446149
GIST	<p>Two "highly relevant" pieces of intelligence received by MI5 in the months before the Manchester Arena attack were not shared with their partners in counter-terrorism police, the inquiry has heard.</p> <p>On two separate occasions in the months before the attack, intelligence was received by MI5 of which the significance was "not fully appreciated at the time."</p> <p>It was assessed at the time to relate to "possible non-nefarious activity" or to "criminality" on the part of Salman Abedi, but, in retrospect, was "highly relevant to the planned attack".</p> <p>However, the inquiry was told that the information was not shared or analysed by counter-terrorism police.</p> <p>MI5 also failed to share details that the bomber had been in touch with a subject of interest who had a "previous affiliation with an extremist group in Libya."</p> <p>Labelled "Subject of Interest C" for the inquiry, Abedi was in touch with the individual in 2015, two years before the bombing, the inquiry heard.</p>

Sir John Saunders, the inquiry chairman, has ruled that there is "centrally important material" relevant to the question of whether MI5 could have prevented the attacks that cannot be revealed to the public.

As a result, for the first time in an inquest or inquiry since 9/11, some hearings will take place behind closed doors.

The details emerged after the head of Counter-Terrorism Policing in [Manchester](#) spoke of his regret at failing to stop the attack on the arena.

Detective Chief Superintendent Dominic Scally was head of intelligence for the North West Counter-Terrorism Unit at the time of the bombing and now heads up Counter-Terrorism Policing North West (CTPNW).

As he began two days of giving evidence to the inquiry, Mr Scally offered his "deepest sympathies and respect for the families of those who died and everyone affected" by the bombing.

He added: "On behalf of my colleagues in the North West Counter-Terrorism Unit, I wanted to say that we work hard every day to protect our communities from terrorism.

"I know it is a source of great regret that we failed to prevent this attack."

Nick de la Poer QC, for the inquiry, said he would not "press you on answers or otherwise challenge" his answers because they would hold further secret sessions over the next three weeks.

After the attack, the parliamentary intelligence and security committee (ISC) reported "cultural differences" and incompatible IT systems between the organisations and noted "an imbalance in the relationship between MI5 and police (perceived or otherwise)".

But, asked if he recognised the description, Mr Scally said: "That is not my experience."

The inquiry heard that the family of the bomber were stopped by police on a number of occasions as they travelled in and out of the country.

Salman Abedi's father, Ramadan, was subject to a number of "port stops" in 2011, when the Western-backed Libyan revolution was in full swing.

On "at least one occasion" Salman Abedi was with him, the inquiry was told.

Mr Scally was asked if the police were aware of alleged links between Ramadan Abedi, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) but said: "Our knowledge of Ramadan is not something I can discuss here."

In September 2015, Ismail Abedi, the bomber's older brother, was stopped as he returned from his honeymoon and extremist material found on his devices.

He suggested it should have persuaded the counter-terrorism unit to refer Salman Abedi, who had been the subject of an investigation the year before, to the Prevent de-radicalisation programme.

Mr Scally said he could not talk about what "sits outside" the port stop but added: "You have adults with extremely unpleasant material, disgusting material on their phones."

But he said they would only be referred to Prevent if there was a "vulnerability" that could be addressed. "Tens of thousands hold extremist views, it is a matter for us where is the thresholds for saying that this individual is at risk of being drawn into terrorism," he said.

The inquiry continues.

HEADLINE	10/27 UK convicts man for terror plot
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-59069363
GIST	<p>A man who hated Muslims and idolised right-wing mass murderers has been convicted of terrorism charges after a two-week trial.</p> <p>Sam Imrie, 24, was arrested in July 2019 after he posted messages on social media saying he was planning to set fire to the Fife Islamic Centre.</p> <p>Imrie was convicted on two charges of breaching the terrorism act.</p> <p>He was also convicted of wilful fire raising, possessing child and "extreme" pornography and drink-driving.</p> <p>Serious offences</p> <p>Imrie, who was remanded in custody, was told that judge Lord Mulholland needed a background report before he could be sentenced.</p> <p>But the judge also warned Imrie: "You will not be surprised to know that you will be receiving a sentence of some length."</p> <p>During the trial, the High Court in Edinburgh was told that Imrie, from Glenrothes, left school at 14 and had developed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after being assaulted.</p> <p>He became "steeped" in right-wing ideology and started to "hate" Muslims after looking at extremist content on websites such as 8Chan and messaging app Telegram.</p> <p>Imrie posted online: "All my heroes are mass murderers."</p> <p>He was said to have "glorified" the activities of Anders Breivik - the terrorist who slaughtered 77 people in Norway in 2011.</p> <p>He also studied the exploits of the far right activist who slaughtered Muslims praying at their mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019.</p> <p>The 24-year-old was said to have wanted Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon "to die" because of her attitudes to immigration.</p> <p>His arrest came after the Metropolitan Police in London infiltrated the "FashWave Artists" group on Telegram, on which Imrie posted messages, images, videos and gifs.</p> <p>They contacted Police Scotland and Imrie was taken into custody in early July 2019.</p> <p>Officers carried out a forensic search of his property, where they recovered weapons including an axe, a hammer, a rifle scope and two knives.</p> <p>Imrie had posted a comment about how he was thinking about carrying out an attack and was considering streaming it.</p> <p>In one posting he wrote: "No guns. All I can do is burn them down."</p> <p>Defence solicitor advocate Jim Keegan QC said Imrie visited the Islamic Centre in Glenrothes on 4 July 2019 in broad daylight but did not do anything.</p>

Instead, his client went to the dilapidated Strathmore Lodge, in Thornton, Fife, and set fire to a doorway. He filmed it and claimed to the group it was a mosque or Islamic centre.

Mr Keegan added: "The effect on his audience was that they ridiculed him.

Imrie said his comments were a joke and he was not serious about setting a mosque on fire.

On Wednesday, Imrie was convicted of a terrorism charge of making statements on Telegram and Facebook which encouraged acts of terrorism.

A second charge stated Imrie made a "record of information" which would be useful to somebody who was committing acts of terrorism.

He was acquitted of a terrorism charge which stated that he engaged in conduct in "preparation" of terrorism acts.

After his arrest, his mum Joyce told police: "I would describe him as a loner who rarely leaves his room. He has no friends that I know of and he has no visitors to the house. He has never had a girlfriend that I know of."

Police also confiscated a USB stick from Imrie. The images contained "extreme" pornographic images of dead women being subjected to sexual acts.

Imrie is expected to be sentenced at the High Court in Glasgow on 24 November.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Taliban allow girls in schools w/caveats
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/world/asia/afghan-girls-school-taliban.html
GIST	<p>MAZAR-I-SHARIF, Afghanistan — When Narges and her younger sisters were finally allowed to return to school last month, they braced for the new world outside their family's gate.</p> <p>Following their mother's lead, each layered on a black dress, black abaya, head scarf and niqab, as well as a face mask. Minutes later, overcome by anxiety, Narges' sister Hadiya, 16, fainted even before leaving the house. When Hadiya finally stepped outside and saw a Talib for the first time, tears poured down her face.</p> <p>Still, the girls consider themselves lucky. In Mazar-i-Sharif, a commercial hub in Afghanistan's north, the Taliban have allowed middle- and high school-aged girls back into the classrooms, even as in the rest of the country most have been forced to stay home.</p> <p>Under pressure from foreign governments and international aid groups, Taliban officials insist that things will be different for girls and women from the last time the militants were in power, and that some form of education for them will be permitted, including graduate and postgraduate programs.</p> <p>Some middle and high schools have already been allowed to reopen their doors to girls in the north, where women have long played a more prominent role in society than in the Taliban's southern heartland. The decision underscores how cultural differences are shaping the new government's policies in different parts of the country.</p> <p>But many parents and teachers still have doubts that the move means the new government, which so far has kept women out of government and most public-facing jobs, will rule any different than before.</p> <p>"They may open schools, but indirectly they are trying to destroy women's education," said Shakila, Narges and Hadiya's mother.</p>

When schools reopened to teenage girls last month, the news energized Narges, 17, a top student determined to become a surgeon. But it filled Shakila, 50, with dread.

Shakila remembered crying for days after losing her job as a literature professor during the Taliban's first regime, which barred girls from school and women from most public-facing roles in society. Even if her daughters could attend high school, she knew they would graduate into a country starkly at odds with their ambitions.

On her daughter's first day of class, she approached one of Narges' teachers at Fatima Balkh High School with an unusual request: Please, she said, make the girls less excited about their education.

"This generation is fragile," Shakila said, glancing at her daughter, Narges. Their last name has been withheld for their protection. "If she can't go to university, she'll be completely destroyed."

Already in Mazar-i-Sharif, the conditions for girls' return are so restrictive that many are simply forgoing education altogether — an echo of the old order.

New rules segregating classes and teachers by gender have exacerbated a severe teacher shortage and threaten to eliminate higher education opportunities for girls. Many parents have kept their daughters home, afraid to send them to school with armed Talibs lining the streets. Others no longer see the value of educating daughters who would graduate into a country where job opportunities for women seemed to disappear overnight.

In Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz city, another major hub in the north where middle and high schools have reopened to girls, fewer than half of many schools' female students have returned to classes, teachers say.

During the first Taliban regime, in the 1990s, women and girls were barred from going to school. Those restrictions were lifted when the Taliban were toppled in 2001, and education opportunities for women gradually blossomed. By 2018, four out of 10 students enrolled in schools were girls, according to UNESCO.

In urban centers like Mazar-i-Sharif, education became a vital pathway to independence for young women over the past 20 years, and schools the center of their social worlds.

One recent afternoon at Fatima Balkh High School, a flurry of teenage girls in black uniforms and white headscarves flooded the school's hallways as students were dismissed from morning classes, their chatter echoing in the building's marble atrium.

By the front gate, a small group of girls struggled to tie the straps of their niqabs — the sheer black fabric blowing in the wind — while others pulled sky blue burqas over their heads as they prepared to leave the school grounds. On either side of the gate hung Two Taliban flags.

The school's bustling hallways were a stark turnabout from just a month ago, when 90 percent of students stayed home, according to the school's principal, Shamail Wahid Sowaida.

Some had heard rumors that the Taliban would force young girls to marry their fighters, she said. Most had never seen members of the Taliban before they seized the city in August. Ever since, Taliban fighters carrying old Kalashnikovs have lined its streets.

International human rights groups have admonished the new government for not yet reopening all schools to girls — even as their male classmates returned last month — and accused the Taliban of using threats and intimidation to keep attendance rates for all girls schools low.

“The right to education is a fundamental human right,” Agnès Callamard, secretary general of Amnesty International, said in a statement earlier this month. “The policies currently pursued by the Taliban are discriminatory, unjust and violate international law.”

Sitting in his office in downtown Mazar-i-Sharif one recent afternoon, the Taliban’s director of education for Balkh Province, Abdul Jalil Shahidkhel, insisted that the new government planned to reopen girls’ middle and high schools in other provinces soon.

Then he paused to ask: “Why is the West so concerned about women?”

“If the world presses that Afghan women should be the same as Western women, then it is only a dream,” he said. “We know, Islam knows and our women know what to do.”

The Taliban have not clearly stated why some girls have been allowed to return, but not others. But other recent policy decisions, like excluding women from top government positions and shuttering the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, have sent a clear message to Afghan women: Even if they can get an education, their role in society will be severely circumscribed.

“What is the point of school if we are not able to work?” said Anosha, 21, sitting in her family’s living room in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Until August, Anosha had been in grade 12, preparing to apply to university to study engineering. But since then, she has not left her home — paralyzed by fear of the Taliban.

These days she spends most of her time alone in her room, WhatsApping with her two best friends, both of whom fled Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover, and hoping to leave the country too.

But some girls cannot even dream of getting out. Preparing for the future they hope for in Afghanistan is the only option.

One recent Friday morning at the Daqiq Institute, an educational center that tutors students studying for the national university entrance exam, hundreds of girls filed into worn wooden benches to take their weekly practice test.

“The girls are more eager to learn than the boys,” said the manager of the institute, Haqiq Hutak. “They take it more seriously. They have something to prove.”

He glanced at the results from the previous week’s practice exam: Four of the five top scorers were girls.

Sitting in the back of the class, Husnia, 18, pulled at the brown fabric of her abaya as she explained how a Taliban on the street of Mazar admonished her for wearing brown — a Western color, he said — rather than black.

Her friend Hadia, 18, threw her hands up and interrupted her.

“They say we have to cover our face, we have to cover our hands, it’s disrespectful,” she said. “Our freedom is choosing what we want to wear — we have that freedom.”

For Hadia, the Taliban takeover has been a period of whiplash.

As the Taliban broke the city’s front lines, her mother told her to hide her school books under her bed and throw blankets over her television and computer, afraid the militants would go house to house and destroy them, as they did when they seized control of the city in the late 1990s.

	<p>Six weeks later, she returned to her high school where classes — though half full — had resumed. Then she resumed the tutoring sessions for the university exam, pulling her books out from underneath her bed and focusing her energy on acing the test next year.</p> <p>“I don’t know what will happen with the Taliban or not,” she said. “But we have to study. It’s all we have right now.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Dutch court convicts Iranian refugee
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/dutch-court-convicts-iranian-refugee-terror-charges-80813083
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- A court in the Netherlands convicted an Iranian refugee Wednesday of preparing and financing terror attacks in his homeland targeting the Iranian government and its supporters. The 42-year-old man was sentenced to four years imprisonment.</p> <p>The man, whose identity was not released in line with Dutch privacy rules, was linked to the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz, a separatist group in the oil-rich Ahwaz region of southern Iran.</p> <p>The man, is from Ahwaz, but he was tried in Rotterdam District Court because he has lived in the Netherlands since being granted residency as a refugee.</p> <p>The court said in a statement that the defendant was in contact with separatists who planned and carried out attacks in Iran, including torching banks, but also targeting people linked to the Iranian government. He discussed possible targets, offered financial support and urged separatists to make video recordings of attacks, the written judgment said.</p> <p>Through his actions, “the suspect played an important role in a criminal and terrorist organization whose goal was to support attacks in Iran,” the court said.</p> <p>Prosecutors sought a six-year prison sentence, but judges said they gave a lower sentence because of the man's personal history, which he said included being imprisoned and tortured in Iran.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Watchdog: violence to Afghan journalists
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/watchdog-30-recent-cases-violence-afghan-journalists-80814288
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD -- More than 30 instances of violence and threats of violence against Afghan journalists were recorded in the last two months, with nearly 90% committed by the Taliban, a media watchdog said Wednesday.</p> <p>More than 40% of the cases recorded by The Afghanistan National Journalists Union were physical beatings and another 40% were verbal threats of violence, said Masorro Lutfi, the group's head. The remainder involved cases in which journalists were imprisoned for a day.</p> <p>One journalist was killed.</p> <p>Most of the cases in September and October were documented in provinces across Afghanistan outside the capital Kabul, but six of the 30 cases of violence took place in the capital, ANJU said.</p> <p>Lutfi, in a news conference Wednesday, said while most of the instances of violence — or threats of violence — were perpetrated by Taliban members, three of the 30 cases were carried out by unknown persons.</p>

The report comes as Afghanistan's Taliban rulers attempt to open diplomatic channels with an international community largely reluctant to formally recognize their rule. They are trying to position themselves as responsible rulers, who promise security for all.

Taliban deputy cultural and information minister and spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told The Associated Press they are aware of the cases of violence toward journalists and are investigating in order to punish the perpetrators.

“The new transition and unprofessionalism of our friends caused it,” said Mujahid, promising the problem will be solved.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for an attack by gunmen in early October in which journalist Sayed Maroof Sadat was killed in eastern Nangarhar province along with his cousin and two Taliban members.

Since the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in late August, three journalists including Sadat have been killed in Afghanistan. Alireza Ahmadi, a reporter of Raha News Agency, and Najma Sadeqi, an anchor at Jahan-e-Sehat TV channel were killed in a suicide attack at Kabul airport during the evacuation.

Taliban officials have repeatedly urged media to follow Islamic laws but without elaborating. Lutfi said his group is working on a bill with media outlets and Taliban officials to enable the media to continue their daily operations.

Afghanistan has long been dangerous for journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists said in early September that 53 journalists have been killed in the country since 2001, including 33 since 2018.

In July, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer from Reuters was killed covering clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces. In 2014, an Agence France-Presse journalist, his wife and two children were among nine people killed by Taliban gunmen while dining at a hotel in Kabul.

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 JBLM: 3 accidentally receive Covid shots
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/three-patients-accidentally-given-covid-19-vaccine-while-at-jblm-facility
GIST	<p>JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. – Three people at JBLM were given the COVID-19 vaccine on accident.</p> <p>Joint Base Lewis-McChord confirmed to KOMO News the three were in for another vaccine when the mistake happened.</p> <p>“Joint Base Lewis-McChord is aware three people were inadvertently administered the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine instead of another vaccine at the Lewis Main Exchange,” COL Joey Sullinger said. “Positive corrective action has been taken at this vaccination site to prevent such errors from happening again. Army medical professionals are notifying and ensuring the health and welfare of those affected. This incident is under investigation.”</p> <p>No other information was immediately available.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Coast Guard: 106 containers still floating
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/106-shipping-containers-floating-in-pacific-ocean-following-bomb-cyclone-cargo-ship-fire

GIST	<p>NEAH BAY, Wash. - As many as 106 shipping containers from the Zim Kingston have been left drifting in the Pacific Ocean, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.</p> <p>The cargo ship had a rough weekend, hitting choppy waves near the Strait of Juan de Fuca on Friday that sent dozens of shipping containers overboard. Late on Saturday, a fire broke out in 10 damaged containers aboard the ship.</p> <p>With the fire finally put out on Sunday, the ship's crew was able to return and take inventory. Officials now say that 106 containers—not their previous estimate of 40—are drifting along the western coast of Vancouver Island.</p> <p>The Canadian and U.S. Coast Guard are working to track down these shipping containers, now that the bomb cyclone has passed.</p> <p>Anyone who finds a container is warned not to open it; two of the containers that fell into the ocean contain potassium amylxanthate, a hazardous chemical found in many of the containers that caught fire. Instead, they are asked to call the Canadian Coast Guard at 1-800-889-8852.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 What did sub hit in South China Sea?
SOURCE	https://news.usni.org/2021/10/27/navy-not-sure-what-uss-connecticut-struck-in-the-south-china-sea-beijing-accuses-u-s-of-cover-up
GIST	<p>The U.S. Navy still isn't positive what one of its most powerful attack submarines hit in the South China Sea, as repair assessments continue in Guam, four sources familiar with the results of the preliminary investigations told USNI News this week.</p> <p>As of Tuesday afternoon, the undersea object that damaged the forward section of USS Connecticut (SSN-22) had not been definitively determined as part of several investigations into the Oct. 2 incident, the sources said.</p> <p>Early indications were Connecticut hit a seamount in the South China Sea, two defense officials familiar with the Navy's examination of the submarines told USNI News, but that has not been confirmed by investigators. Politico first reported earlier this month that the boat may have hit an undersea feature.</p> <p>Cmdr. Cindy Fields, a spokesperson with Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, told USNI News the command had nothing to add to its initial statement on what the submarine hit. She said two investigations – a safety investigation board convened by COMSUBPAC and a command investigation overseen by the Japan-based U.S. 7th Fleet – are currently looking into the incident.</p> <p>“Connecticut struck an object while submerged on the afternoon of Oct. 2, while operating in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region,” PACFLEET said on Oct. 7.</p> <p>The impact to the forward part of the attack submarine damaged the submarine's forward ballast tanks and forced the boat to make a week-long trip on the surface to Guam, two defense officials told USNI News this week.</p> <p>The four sources confirmed the Navy's public statement that the reactor compartment of the submarine was undamaged from when the boat hit the object.</p> <p>Since returning to Guam, the boat is still under evaluation for the scope of repairs by Naval Sea Systems Command, personnel from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and submarine tender USS Emory S. Land (AS-39), Fields told USNI News on Tuesday.</p> <p>The teams will first determine what repairs Connecticut needs to leave Guam safely and then follow-on repairs, Fields said. The closest dry dock for major submarine maintenance is in Hawaii. The Puget Sound</p>

	<p>Naval Shipyard, which is near the attack boat's homeport in Bremerton, Wash., is the second closest dry dock.</p> <p>While repairs and several investigations continue, Chinese officials have accused the U.S. of concealing details of the incident from Beijing.</p> <p>"The Chinese side has repeatedly expressed grave concerns over the matter and asked the U.S. side to make clarifications," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said on Tuesday.</p> <p>"We have seen nothing but a brief and vague statement issued by the U.S. military with procrastination, and a confirmation by a so-called informant that the incident did happen in the South China Sea. Such an irresponsible, cagey practice gives regional countries and the international community every reason to question the truth of the incident and the intention of the U.S."</p> <p>Connecticut is one of three Seawolf-class attack submarines. The boat left in May for a deployment to the Western Pacific and has made at least two port calls to Japan.</p> <p>Pentagon spokesman John Kirby earlier this month dismissed China's accusation that the U.S. was engaging in a coverup of the incident.</p> <p>"It's an odd way of covering something up when you put out a press release about it," Kirby told reporters when asked about China's allegation.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Climate change amplifies global violence?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211027-how-climate-change-contributes-to-global-violence
GIST	<p>On 1 November, the much-anticipated United Nations summit on Climate Change, known as COP26, is set to take place in Glasgow, Scotland. Its goal is to devise a global strategy on cutting emissions to keep alive the possibility of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a Paris Accord threshold beyond which the consequences become far more severe and even catastrophic. Some, such as U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry, have suggested this conference is one of our last chances to prevent some of the worst outcomes of climate change. To add to this sense of urgency, the 2021 Lancet report on Health and Climate Change, released in early October, lays out in stark and grim detail the myriad ways in which the direct and indirect consequences of climate change pose significant threats to the health and well-being of humans around the world on a scale we have not experienced in the modern world. Whether through drought, extreme heat waves, food insecurity, lack of potable water, changing disease vectors or any number of other impacts, large swaths of the globe will increasingly suffer from unhealthy and dangerous conditions brought about by climate change that threaten to overwhelm the ability of communities and governments to cope and adapt to these emerging challenges.</p> <p>To add to this grim forecast, not long after the <i>Lancet</i> report was released, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence distributed the first-ever National Intelligence Estimate on Climate Change, which warns of global instability and heightened tensions and conflict between nations as the consequences of a warming world.</p> <p>Representing the collective assessment of all 18 U.S. intelligence agencies about the risks these changes hold for national security, the report not only identifies regions and nations that are particularly vulnerable to instability and conflict, but also points out that such situations tend to produce large number of refugees that are vulnerable to exploitation and persecution, can destabilize surrounding regions and create massive humanitarian disasters.</p> <p>These reports come on the heels of earlier publications that only serve to highlight the crisis we find ourselves facing.</p>

One U.S. government report released in 2020 detailed the financial and human costs of climate change for the United States and concluded that climate change will cost hundreds of billions of dollars annually and will result in thousands of additional deaths every year from the direct and indirect consequences of a warmer world.

Of key importance are the often interconnected ways in which climate change will negatively impact infrastructure and transportation, energy demand and production, domestic and international trade, agriculture, fishing, tourism, water availability, health care and many other economic sectors of society. These kinds of consequences are not limited to the United States but are truly global in their impact. There is no nation or region of the world not affected by climate change, although as these reports make clear, the negative impacts tend to be concentrated among nations and populations that are the poorest, most vulnerable and least equipped to handle such challenges.

As someone who studies collective violence, genocide and mass atrocity, I have long been concerned with the ways in which climate change can amplify intolerance and persecution and facilitate violent conflict, including war and genocide. Collective violence doesn't just erupt spontaneously but is brought about by specific triggers and situations, and many of these relate to the consequences of climate change. Many past and contemporary conflicts and wars, for example, have revolved around protecting or acquiring scarce or diminishing resources, especially fresh potable water. Given that around one quarter of the world's population is currently dealing with extreme water stress and critical shortages, a situation expected to worsen dramatically in the coming years, we can easily understand how access to fresh water can become a flash point for conflict. In fact, this precise issue has already strained relations and heightened tensions between many nations, including India and Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and Yemen and Saudi Arabia, to name just a few examples.

Population displacement is another potential source of conflict since all estimates point to a significant increase in the number of people dislocated in the coming years and decades. Sometimes it will happen because of catastrophic weather events such as flooding and hurricanes, while other times it will occur because of slower climate change processes, such as drought, that will progressively drive people from their homes, communities and livelihoods. It appears that the human climate niche is shrinking dramatically, and a lot more people will be on the move in the coming years and decades as they search for security, safety and opportunity.

All these challenges will strain the ability of governments to meet the needs of their citizens, heighten tensions among and between communities, populations and nations, and encourage othering, scapegoating and persecution of those defined as different, dangerous or simply superfluous. In short, as nations struggle to cope with catastrophic weather events, diminishing resources, environmental degradation, population dislocation and various other climate-induced problems, violence becomes not only possible, but also more likely. It is a situation tailor-made for the violent persecution of vulnerable population groups such as refugees and racial, religious and ethnic minorities.

These are dire scenarios and truly force us to confront the central crisis of our era. To prevent the worst outcomes of climate change, it is clear that we need to collectively implement far more aggressive steps than we have yet undertaken. This recognition seems to be gaining momentum as individuals, communities and political and social leaders around the world appear increasingly willing to confront hard choices. There is also hope to be found in the resilience displayed by many communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. While social media and news reports have often focused on those individuals, leaders and communities that have fallen prey to misinformation, hostility and resistance to public health measures, we should also remember that the vast majority of people have not reacted in such negative and hostile ways. Across the globe, we have seen individuals and communities work together to care for and support each other in often dire circumstances. Countless people from all walks of life have sacrificed and risked their own personal safety and comfort to provide aid and assistance for the sick and to preserve the basic functioning of society. Persecution, violence and anarchy are not inevitable consequences of climate change, but instead reflect the choices we make individually and collectively. How we choose to respond at this inflection point in the history of humanity will be critical for determining the kind of environment, planet and civilization that we leave for our children and their descendants.

HEADLINE	10/27 Cigarette sales rise; first time in decades
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/10/27/cigarette-sales-ftc-data/
GIST	<p>New government data shows that sales of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products increased last year for the first time in two decades, raising concerns that pandemic-related stress spurred an uptick in smoking.</p> <p>Sales of the addictive, cancer-causing products have been trending downward for three decades amid an array of government anti-smoking programs.</p> <p>The largest U.S. cigarette producers sold an estimated 203.7 billion cigarettes to wholesalers and retailers in 2020, representing an increase of about 800 million over 2019, according to an annual report released Tuesday by the Federal Trade Commission. Sales of smokeless tobacco products such as chewing tobacco also increased slightly to 126.9 million, according to a parallel FTC report.</p> <p>The FTC figures released Tuesday do not include e-cigarettes, aerosol-based cigarettes also known as vape pens. The FTC issued subpoenas for e-cigarettes sales data in mid-February, but is yet to publish data on them. The CDC has reported that 14.2 percent of adults over the age of 18 smoked cigarettes as of 2019, and 4.4 percent used e-cigarettes.</p> <p>The new FTC data suggest more Americans turned to cigarettes last year amid the stress of a fractured economy and a once-in-a-generation public health crisis.</p> <p>Erika Sward, assistant vice president of advocacy for the American Lung Association, called the FTC numbers “very troubling.” She added that the sales increase was probably driven by people who had previously quit smoking but started again during the pandemic, noting that stress is a primary driver of relapses.</p> <p>Tobacco executives believe that stimulus checks and enhanced unemployment benefits have made a difference as well, as lower-income smokers have been able to buy in bulk when they go to the store.</p> <p>“Fewer social engagements allow for more tobacco-use occasions,” Billy Gifford, chief executive of Marlboro cigarette maker Altria Group, told investors in a July 2020 earnings call.</p> <p>It’s unclear whether the increased sales were driven by new smokers, by relapses, or by increased volume among existing smokers.</p> <p>New CDC data could shed light on those questions later this year, one analyst said. It’s also too soon to tell whether the same trend continued into 2021.</p> <p>Altria Group, in its second-quarter 2021 earnings reported in late July, reported an 8.9 percent revenue increase compared to the second quarter of 2020.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Rare, deadly cyclone floods Italy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/10/27/catania-flash-flood-italy-medicane/
GIST	<p>Floods sparked by days of heavy rainfall ravaged the Italian island of Sicily on Tuesday, forcing evacuations and stay-at-home notices to be issued amid the severe weather, which also swept the region of Calabria in southwest Italy.</p> <p>At least two people died as a powerful cyclonic storm dumped an estimated 300 mm (11.8 inches) of water — almost half the average amount of the island’s expected annual rainfall — in just a few hours on Sunday and into Monday, the Sicilian Farmers’ Association said.</p>

According to experts, the extreme wet weather is a result of a rare “medicane,” also known as a Mediterranean hurricane. [Medicanes are typically smaller and shorter in duration than hurricanes](#), although they can still bring strong winds and torrential rain.

Italy’s fire department [said](#) Monday that firefighters had carried out close to 600 flood rescues in 24 hours, 400 in Sicily and 180 in Calabria.

Videos shared to social media highlighted the scale of the destruction: many streets were effectively turned into rivers and abandoned vehicles were almost entirely submerged in murky, fast-flowing waters.

“I urge the entire population to not leave home except for emergency reasons,” the mayor of Catania, Salvo Pogliese, posted on Facebook, adding that streets were “overrun by water.”

On Sunday, the Department for Civil Protection issued a red alert — the most severe weather warning — for parts of Sicily and Calabria, warning of a threat to life and property.

The rising water, torrential winds and flooding also forced schools to close.

The wet weather continued into Wednesday, with forecasters predicting more rainfall throughout the week.

The scenes in Italy follow a summer full of deadly floods across Europe that wreaked havoc in communities ranging from Germany and Belgium, all the way to the United Kingdom.

A recent study [found](#) that extreme flooding is set to increase as global temperatures rise.

This month, leaders will gather in Glasgow, Scotland, for this year’s global climate conference — but most of the world is already feeling the [repercussions of its inaction](#) — be it through intense heat waves, wildfires or flooding.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Study: harmful plastics in fast-food items
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/10/27/fast-food-phthalates-plastics/
GIST	<p>What’s in that fast-food burger? Sometimes, harmful plastics.</p> <p>A new study out Tuesday reports that far too often, small amounts of industrial chemicals called phthalates (pronounced THA-lates), which are used to make plastics soft, have been found in samples of food from popular outlets including McDonald’s, Pizza Hut and Chipotle.</p> <p>George Washington University researcher Lariah Edwards, professor Ami Zota and their colleagues purchased 64 fast-food items from national burger chains McDonald’s and Burger King; pizza chains Pizza Hut and Domino’s; and Tex-Mex chains Taco Bell and Chipotle, all around San Antonio.</p> <p>The study found harmful chemicals in a majority of samples collected. Phthalates are linked to health problems, including disruption to the endocrine system, and fertility and reproductive problems, as well as increased risk for learning, attention and behavioral disorders in children.</p> <p>None of the six restaurant chains responded to requests for comment.</p> <p>The Food and Drug Administration, which regulates the safety of food, has no legal thresholds limiting phthalate concentrations in food. The levels of phthalates found in the fast food that researchers tested were below the Environmental Protection Agency’s health protective thresholds, Edwards said. Under guidelines, the levels of phthalates researchers found would not have raised alarms at federal agencies.</p>

The FDA said in a statement that it will review the George Washington study and consider it as part of the body of scientific evidence.

“Although the FDA has high safety standards, as new scientific information becomes available, we reevaluate our safety assessments,” said an FDA spokesperson. “Where new information raises safety questions, the FDA may revoke food additive approvals, if the FDA is no longer able to conclude that there is a reasonable certainty of no harm from the authorized use.”

The restaurant food and supply chains are long and there are many places along that chain that food comes in contact with plastics and packaging, said Larry Lynch, senior vice president of science and industry at the National Restaurant Association, which represents the restaurants in question. That said, operators and owners work closely with their suppliers to ensure they have packaging and supplies that meet all FDA guidelines and best practices, Lynch added.

Although some phthalates have been banned from toys and other products, they are frequently used to make such things as rubber gloves, industrial tubing or food conveyor belts pliable and can migrate from those things into the foods we ingest.

All of the foods the GWU researchers tested contained one or more phthalates or other plasticizer chemicals, according to the study, which received funding from foundations that promote liberal or left-leaning policies.

Food items sold by fast-food chains are heavily processed, packaged and handled, providing more opportunities to come into contact with these phthalates and plasticizers. The researchers collected food-handling gloves from many of the restaurants, which also tested positive for these chemicals.

While identifying sources of the chemicals was not part of the study, the researchers hypothesized that the concentration of these chemicals was because phthalates and replacement plasticizers exist throughout the food supply chain, with food coming into contact with packaging and food-handling gloves, as well as processing equipment such as industrial tubing and conveyors, said Edwards, the lead author.

Pizza pockets and late-night fries: How the government is urging food companies and restaurants to reduce our salt consumption

The researchers found that more than 80 percent of the food samples contained a phthalate called DnBP, which has been linked to heightened risk for asthma, and that 70 percent contained DEHP, which has been found to be linked to increased risk of reproductive problems.

The team also found 86 percent of the foods contained a plasticizer called DEHT, which was developed to replace phthalates, according to Edwards. These alternative non-phthalate plasticizers’ potential effects on human health and the environment are not yet well studied.

The Chronic Hazard Advisory Panel of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has strongly recommended that appropriate federal agencies study exposure to the phthalate alternatives and assess potential health risks, according to Patty Davis, the CPSC’s press secretary. The FDA is charged with regulating food packaging and food processing equipment as “indirect food additives.”

In the George Washington University study, foods containing meats had higher levels of phthalates, with chicken burritos and cheeseburgers testing higher for DEHT (gloves collected from the same restaurants also contained this chemical). Cheese pizzas and fries had the lowest levels of most chemicals tested.

Previous research by Zota, a professor of environmental and occupational health at GWU’s Milken School of Public Health, showed that people who often cook their own food at home have lower levels of these chemicals in their bodies, probably because home cooks do not use food handling gloves or as much plastic packaging.

She also previously tracked fast-food consumption in a national survey and found people who reported eating more fast foods had higher levels of phthalates.

The new report, published in the Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology, is among the first to examine the link between fast food and non-phthalate plasticizers such as DEHT that are increasingly being used in place of banned or restricted phthalates in food packaging and processing equipment.

The study results also raise concerns that people of color and low-income Americans may be disproportionately affected by these chemicals, according to Zota.

“Disadvantaged neighborhoods often have plenty of fast-food outlets but limited access to healthier foods like fruits and vegetables,” Zota said. “Additional research needs to be done to find out whether people living in such food deserts are at higher risk of exposure to these harmful chemicals.”

Edwards said the team selected restaurants that were ranked most popular in each category by market share data, testing multiple outposts for each chain and sampling their best-selling food items, ordering each item with standard toppings or fillings. Items were transported to the lab in a cooler in their original packaging, and then each menu item was blended into a slurry, the liquid tested for these chemicals via a technique called gas chromatography-mass spectrometry.

Among the funders for the research were three liberal California-based foundations: the Passport Foundation, which funds environmental and left-leaning economic and social policy causes; the Forsythia Foundation, which funds research that aims to reduce harmful chemicals in the environment; and the Marisla Foundation, which supports health-service organizations and environmental causes.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Affidavit: movie set gun not checked
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/movies/rust-shooting-investigation-dave-halls.html
GIST	<p>SANTA FE, N.M. — Before he handed a revolver that he had declared “cold” to the actor Alec Baldwin on the set of the film “Rust” last week, Dave Halls, an assistant director on the film, told a detective he should have inspected each round in each chamber, according to an affidavit that was released Wednesday. But he did not.</p> <p>“He advised he should have checked all of them, but didn’t,” according to an affidavit, which was signed by Detective Alexandria Hancock of the Santa Fe County Sheriff’s office.</p> <p>It turned out that the gun was not “cold.” The revolver, a .45 Long Colt, contained a live round, Sheriff Adan Mendoza of Santa Fe County said at a news conference Wednesday. The gun went off as Mr. Baldwin rehearsed a scene on Thursday, killing the film’s cinematographer, Halyna Hutchins, 42, and wounding its director, Joel Souza, 48.</p> <p>The sheriff said that the “lead projectile” that Mr. Baldwin had fired from the gun had been recovered from the director’s shoulder, and said that it was apparently the same round that had killed Ms. Hutchins. Asked if it was an actual bullet that had been fired — and not a blank — he said, “We would consider it a live round, a bullet, live, because it did fire from the weapon and obviously caused the death of Ms. Hutchins and injured Mr. Souza.”</p> <p>“We also believe that we have the spent shell casing from the bullet that was fired from the gun,” he said.</p> <p>Sheriff Mendoza said that investigators believe they recovered more live rounds on the film’s set at Bonanza Creek Ranch, and that they would be sending some of the ammunition they seized to the F.B.I. crime lab for analysis. “We have recovered what we believe to be possible additional live rounds on set,” he said.</p>

It was still unclear why there was any live ammunition on the set — it is generally forbidden on film sets — and how a live round came to be in the gun that Mr. Baldwin was handed.

The Santa Fe County district attorney, Mary Carmack-Altwies, said at the news conference that the inquiry was continuing, and that criminal charges were still possible. “If the facts and evidence and law support charges, then I will initiate prosecution at that time,” she said.

The film’s armorer, Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, told a detective that “no live ammo is ever kept on set,” according to the affidavit. Ms. Gutierrez-Reed, 24, who had only recently begun working as a lead armorer, told a detective that on the day of the shooting, she had checked dummy rounds — which contain no gunpowder and are used to resemble bullets on camera — and ensured they were not “hot,” according to the affidavit.

Just before the shooting the crew took a break for lunch, she told the detective, and the ammunition was left out on a cart on the set.

Describing the safety protocols on the set, Mr. Halls said that Ms. Gutierrez-Reed typically opened guns for him to inspect. “I check the barrel for obstructions, most of the time there is no live fire, she (Hannah) opens the hatch and spins the drum, and I say ‘cold gun on set,’” he said in an interview with Detective Hancock, according to the affidavit. It was not clear precisely what he meant by the term “live fire.”

Mr. Halls said that when Ms. Gutierrez-Reed showed him the gun before they continued the rehearsal, he only remembered seeing three rounds. He could not recall if she had “spun the drum,” according to the affidavit.

After the shooting, Mr. Halls said, he picked up the gun from a pew inside the church and took it to Ms. Gutierrez-Reed. When she opened it, he said, according to the affidavit, he could see “at least four dummy casings with the holes on the side, and one without the hole. He advised this did not have the cap on it and was just the casing.” Dummy rounds are sometimes identified by a pierced hole on the side.

Sheriff Mendoza said about 500 rounds of ammunition had been recovered from the set, including a mixture of blanks, dummy rounds and what the sheriff’s department believes to be live ammunition.

In recent days there has been increasing scrutiny of Mr. Halls and Ms. Gutierrez-Reed, since they handled the gun before it went off.

Mr. Halls, an industry veteran who has worked on films including “Fargo” and “The Matrix Reloaded,” has been the subject of various complaints over the years about safety, and was fired from the movie “Freedom’s Path” in 2019 after a gun unexpectedly discharged, causing a minor injury to a crew member. There were at least two [accidental gun discharges](#) on the set of “Rust” before the fatal shooting, according to three former members of the film’s crew. Mr. Halls didn’t respond to several attempts to reach him.

Ms. Gutierrez-Reed, who also goes by Hannah Reed and Hannah Gutierrez, said on a podcast posted last month that she had just finished filming her first movie as head armorer in another western called “The Old Way,” starring Clint Howard and Nicolas Cage, that is set for release next year. “I was really nervous about it at first, and I almost didn’t take the job because I wasn’t sure if I was ready, but doing it, it went really smoothly,” Ms. Gutierrez-Reed said of that movie in the podcast, [“Voices of the West.”](#) She is the daughter of Thell Reed, a shooting expert and a consultant to the movie industry.

Ms. Gutierrez-Reed told the detective that at the start of the lunch break, the firearms were secured inside a safe on a “prop truck.” During that time, she said that some ammunition was left on a cart, where it was “not secured,” and some was kept in the truck, according to the affidavit, which was filed

	<p>in Santa Fe County Magistrate Court and was being used to ask for a search warrant for the “prop truck.”</p> <p>After lunch, the film’s prop master, Sarah Zachry, took the firearms from the safe and handed them to Ms. Gutierrez-Reed, the armorer, according to Ms. Gutierrez-Reed’s account to the detective.</p> <p>“She advised there are only a few people that have access and the combination to the safe,” the affidavit said.</p> <p>Over the last few days, questions have been raised about how the fatal shooting could have occurred if safety protocols had been followed properly.</p> <p>“I think there was some complacency on this set,” Sheriff Mendoza said. “Any time firearms are involved, safety is paramount.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Turkey’s 2nd largest lake dries up
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/turkeys-lake-tuz-dries-due-climate-change-farming-80829342
GIST	<p>KONYA, Turkey -- For centuries, Lake Tuz in central Turkey has hosted huge colonies of flamingos that migrate and breed there when the weather is warm, feeding on algae in the lake’s shallow waters.</p> <p>This summer, however, a heart-wrenching scene replaced the usual splendid sunset images of the birds captured by wildlife photographer Fahri Tunc. Carcasses of flamingo hatchlings and adults scattered across the cracked, dried-up lake bed.</p> <p>The 1,665 square kilometer (643 square mile) lake — Turkey’s second-largest lake and home to several bird species — has entirely receded this year. Experts say Lake Tuz (Salt Lake in Turkish) is a victim of climate change-induced drought, which has hit the region hard, and decades of harmful agricultural policies that have exhausted underground water supply.</p> <p>“There were about 5,0000 young flamingos. They all perished because there was no water,” said Tunc, who also heads the regional branch of the Turkish environmental group Doga Dernegi. “It was an incredibly bad scene. It’s not something I can erase from my life. I hope I do not come across such a scene again.”</p> <p>Several other lakes across Turkey have similarly dried up or have receded to alarming levels, affected by low precipitation and unsustainable irrigation practices. Climate experts warn that the entire Mediterranean basin, which includes Turkey, is particularly at risk of severe drought and desertification.</p> <p>In Lake Van, Turkey’s largest lake, located in the country's east, fishing boats no longer could approach a dock last week after the water fell to unusual levels, HaberTurk television reported.</p> <p>“(We have) rising temperatures and decreasing rain, and on the other side, the water needs for irrigation in agriculture,” said Levent Kurnaz, a scientist at Bogazici University’s Center for Climate Change and Policy Studies. “It’s a bad situation all over Turkey at the moment.”</p> <p>A study based on satellite imagery conducted by Turkey's Ege University shows that water levels at Lake Tuz started to drop beginning in 2000, according to Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency. The lake completely receded this year due to rising temperatures, intensified evaporation and insufficient rain, according to the study.</p> <p>The study also noted a sharp decline in underground water levels around Lake Tuz, a hypersaline lake that straddles the Turkish provinces of Ankara, Konya and Aksaray.</p>

The Konya basin in central Anatolia, which includes Lake Tuz, was once known as Turkey's breadbasket. Farms in the region have turned to growing profitable but water-intensive crops such as corn, sugar-beet and alfalfa, which have drained groundwater supplies, photographer Tunc said. Farmers have dug thousands of unlicensed wells while streams feeding the lake have dried up or been diverted, he said.

Environmental groups say poor government agricultural policies play a significant role in the deterioration of Turkey's lakes.

"If you don't pay them enough money, the farmers, they will plant whatever is water intensive and will make money for them. And if you just tell them it's not allowed, then they won't vote for you in the next election," Kurnaz said.

The overuse of groundwater is also making the region more susceptible to the formation of sinkholes. Dozens of such depressions have been discovered around Konya's Karapinar district, including one that Associated Press journalists saw next to a newly harvested alfalfa field.

Tunc, 46, a native of Aksaray, is saddened by the thought that he won't be able to enjoy the flamingos with his 7-month-old son like he did with his 21-year-old son. He remains hopeful, however, that Lake Tuz may replenish itself, if the government stops the water-intensive agriculture.

Kurnaz, the climate scientist, is less optimistic.

"They keep telling people that they shouldn't use groundwater for this agriculture and people are not listening. There are about 120,000 unlicensed wells in the region, and everybody is pumping out water as if that water will last forever," Kurnaz said.

"But if you are on a flat place, it can rain as much as you want and it won't replenish the groundwater in a short time. It takes maybe thousands of years in central Anatolia to replenish the underground water table," he added.

The drought and flamingo deaths at Lake Tuz were just one of a series of ecological disasters to strike Turkey this summer, believed to be partly due to climate change.

In July, wildfires devastated swaths of forests along Turkey's southern coast, killing eight people and forcing thousands to flee. Parts of the country's northern Black Sea coast were struck by floods that killed 82 people. Earlier, a layer of sea mucilage, blamed on soaring temperatures and poor waste management, covered the Sea of Marmara, threatening marine life.

Although Turkey was among the first countries to sign the 2015 Paris climate agreement, the country held off ratifying it until this month as it sought to be reclassified as a developing country instead of a developed one to avoid harsher emission reduction targets. Turkish lawmakers issued a declaration rejecting the status of developed country at the same time they ratified the climate agreement.

In the town of Eskil, near the shores of Lake Tuz, farmer Cengiz Erkol, 54, checked the irrigation system on his field growing animal feed.

"The waters aren't running as strong and abundant as they used to," he said. "I have four children. The future doesn't look good. Each year is worse than the previous year."

[Return to Top](#)

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE 10/27 Enraged passenger attacks flight attendant

SOURCE	https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2021/10/27/aa-flight-from-new-yorks-jfk-to-john-wayne-airport-diverts-to-denver-after-flight-attendant-attacked-by-passenger/
GIST	<p>SANTA ANA (CBSLA) – An American Airlines flight from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on its way to John Wayne Airport diverted to Denver International after a passenger assaulted a female flight attendant over what witnesses said was a dispute about wearing a mask.</p> <p>Mackenzie Rose, another passenger on the flight, told CBSLA that the incident occurred about halfway through the trip, when the plane was over Ohio. The passenger suspected of assaulting the flight attendant was reportedly in first or business class.</p> <p>The flight attendant, though, did have blood on her after the assault, according to Rose.</p> <p>“I saw her walk by and she had blood on the outside of her mask, which bless her, she was still wearing,” she said.</p> <p>According to the airline, AA Flight 976 was able to taxi safely to the gate where law enforcement removed the passenger.</p> <p>American Airlines released the following statement:</p> <p>“We are outraged by the reports of what took place on board. Acts of violence against our team members are not tolerated by American Airlines. We have engaged local law enforcement and the FBI and we are working with them to ensure they have all the information they need. The individual involved in this incident will never be allowed to travel with American Airlines in the future, but we will not be satisfied until he has been prosecuted to the full extent of the law. This behavior must stop and aggressive enforcement and prosecution of the law is the best deterrent.</p> <p>We thank our crew for their quick action and professionalism to ensure the safety of their fellow team members and customers on board. Our thoughts are with our injured flight attendant and ensuring that she and her fellow crew members have the support they need at this time.”</p> <p>The Federal Aviation Administration also issued a statement noting the incident and said the aircraft landed safely in Denver at around 6:37 p.m. local time, adding that the agency will investigate the matter.</p> <p>“I understand that he actually punched her twice. I did see her walk back down the aisle afterwards. She had blood splattered on the outside of her mask. If you’re not prepared to wear a mask, you’re not prepared to fly is kind of the moral of the story. That was why she was angered, was because....there was an impression that there might be a substance or alcohol involved. In terms of men hitting women, it’s absolutely absurd and ridiculous,” Rose told CBSLA after landing in Santa Ana.</p> <p>Another passenger, identified only as Jack, said a doctor aboard the flight did look at the flight attendant after the assault.</p> <p>“Yeah, there was a doctor on the flight, luckily. So, I don’t know. He said it wasn’t broken, but it was bleeding, so they took her to the hospital,” he said.</p> <p>The flight attendant who suffered the assault was transported to a local hospital, though the airline said it could not comment any further on her condition for privacy reasons.</p> <p>No other injuries were reported, nor was the suspect’s name released.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Man shot, killed in Seattle Central District
SOURCE	https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2021/10/man-shot-and-killed-overnight-in-23rd-and-jackson-parking-lot/
GIST	A man was shot to death overnight in a parking lot at 23rd and Jackson in the Central District.

	<p>According to Seattle Police, and East Precinct and Seattle Fire scanner updates, gunfire was reported in the shopping center parking lot in front of the AutoZone and Starbucks at the corner just after 1 AM.</p> <p>Arriving police and Seattle Fire found a man down in the parking lot who had been assaulted and shot multiple times.</p> <p>Seattle Fire says it was called to treat a man in his 40s for at least two gunshot wounds.</p> <p>He was transported to Harborview where he died of his injuries.</p> <p>The shooting comes amid new community efforts to address gun violence in the area after gunfire broke out during a youth football game at Judkins Park.</p> <p>The shopping center parking lot acquired by Vulcan as part of its development of the former Promenade 23 properties has already been the scene for deadly gun violence this year after 21-year-old Sultan Ujaama was shot and killed there in June. There have been no arrests in that case.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	10/27 Tacoma police: plan to reduce violent crime
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article255215151.html
GIST	<p>Tacoma police have a multi-pronged plan to tamp down violent crime in the city, including a new specialized team and increased patrols in crime-ridden areas.</p> <p>The plan comes amid a surge in homicides and an uptick in assaults, burglaries, robberies, arson and vandalism.</p> <p>“We recognize the traumatic effects that violent crime can cause, and we are committed as a department to doing everything we can to safeguard our community,” Assistant Chief Ed Wade said Friday.</p> <p>When violent crime peaked during the summer, Interim Chief Mike Ake formed the Felony Assault Squad to focus on aggravated assaults and drive-by shootings. The team is comprised of five detectives and one sergeant from the Criminal Investigation Division.</p> <p>Since they started work June 7, the squad has been assigned more than 120 cases and made 15 arrests. It also has issued 12 bulletins to local law enforcement on known offenders to keep an eye out for.</p> <p>Tacoma police also are focusing on “hot spot” areas in the city where crime frequently occurs. Police identified three areas of concern using a density map showing where violent crime occurs the most, such as the downtown corridor. Other areas were the 96th and Steele streets south corridor and the area west of Interstate 5 approximately between South Warner and South Oakes streets.</p> <p>When officers are not busy with routine calls, they will be asked to patrol crime-ridden neighborhoods. The department will hold special emphasis missions several times a week, with four officers or detectives being sent to areas with the most reported crime.</p> <p>Most violent crimes are committed between 8 p.m. and midnight on Saturday and Sunday, according to city data.</p> <p>“The missions are designed to provide a high profile police safety presence in the area to deter violence,” police spokeswoman Wendy Haddow said.</p> <p>Although the special emphasis missions will likely be paid with overtime due to a staffing shortage, the Police Department said it could not immediately provide an estimate for how much that will cost in the coming months.</p>

Partnerships also play a role in the Police Department's strategy to reduce violent crime. Grassroots organization Safe Streets has worked with Tacoma police since 1989. Its program, Youth Leading Change, helps students in middle school and high school build social and emotional skills to aid their development as a young person and keep them out of trouble.

"Promoting those skills and promoting just the ability of our young people to be more emotionally aware and able to talk about things, it reduces the likelihood that they engage in violent or risky behaviors," program manager Rey Ward said.

The department is also coordinating with the city's Human Resources Department to make inroads with hiring and recruiting more officers, particularly persons of color.

"We can't just talk about having the capacity and capability to address violent crime, you gotta have the resources, the people, to do it," Ake told the City Council when he presented his safety plan at a Sept. 28 study session. "People, the officers, are our department's greatest resource, there's no doubt about that."

He hopes to create an officer incentive program to lure new and lateral officers to Tacoma. No details were immediately available about what could be offered to potential applicants.

Although the department will continue to recruit all types of officers, it said it plans to focus its efforts on women of color.

"Our focus on recruiting, targeted towards women, and especially women of color, is in alignment with our equality framework for our workforce to reflect the community it serves," Haddow said. "We know we are underrepresented in this category when compared with the demographics of Tacoma."

Police officials are working with Human Resources to speed up the hiring process, which can take up to six months. Ake is hoping to drop that to four months to get new officers on the street more quickly.

NUMBER OF PATROL OFFICERS DOWN

A staffing shortage has prompted police officials to disband or reduce some special teams to boost patrol numbers, which are lower than previous years.

There were 194 patrol officers and specialists working in Tacoma as of mid-July, which is down from 202 last year and 201 in 2019.

Although there are 364 commissioned police personnel in the budget, only 326 positions are filled and more people continue to leave the department.

So far this year, 21 sworn police have retired and another 11 have left for other reasons, according to Police Department data.

Council members Robert Thoms, Lillian Hunter and Conor McCarthy in August sent a letter to Mayor Victoria Woodards and City Manager Elizabeth Pauli expressing concern that the city wasn't doing enough to keep residents safe and pushing for increased police patrols.

The City Council has said it supports Ake's plan to tamp down violent crime and is considering increasing the Police Department's budget.

"Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of Manuel Ellis, this has been an unprecedented era in defining policing and public safety," the Council said Wednesday in a joint statement.

Ellis was a Black man who died March 3, 2020, after police restrained him. Video captured him saying: "Can't breathe, sir, can't breathe." Three Tacoma officers have been charged in his death.

	The Council said it knows some in the city support increasing the size of the police force, while others fear law enforcement, and they believe Ake's plan balances the needs of both.
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	10/27 WSP investigates shooting near Capitol
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3205753/washington-state-patrol-shooting-olympia/
GIST	<p>Washington State Patrol is working to sort out what led up to a shooting in Olympia at the north end of Capitol Lake on Deschutes Parkway on Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>The male victim is hospitalized with a bullet wound that is not a threat to his life.</p> <p>This is the third shooting this month in the same area. One of them was fatal.</p> <p>Deschutes Parkway is closed Wednesday in the area of the shooting while state patrol investigates, and everyone is asked to avoid the area.</p>
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	10/27 US Marshal fugitive task force in shooting
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3205810/police-shooting-des-moines-safeway/
GIST	<p>A wanted fugitive was shot by the U.S. Marshal Fugitive Task Force on Wednesday near a Safeway grocery store on Pacific Highway South in Des Moines.</p> <p>Des Moines police say law enforcement found the man in the parking lot and he was the only person hurt. No suspects are outstanding, no officers were injured, and there were no other shooting victims.</p> <p>Police say the shooting took place at about 3:09 p.m.</p> <p>Des Moines police officers did not fire shots. Seattle police were also on scene, but were not involved.</p>
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	10/27 To fight murder rate rise cities pay shooters
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/to-fight-rising-murder-rate-more-cities-find-mentor-and-pay-likely-shooters-11635336000?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>FRESNO, Calif.—Earlier this year, a 17-year-old named Devrick Hill was arrested on suspicion of firing multiple firearms out of a car in a conflict between gang members.</p> <p>He was also recruited for a program that provides mentoring, job training, and a stipend of up to \$1,000 a month in exchange for meeting goals that steer them away from violence, like completing classes or getting a job.</p> <p>The program, called Advance Peace Fresno, is trying to reverse a rising murder rate by offering fellowships to people identified as most likely to be involved in shootings.</p> <p>Nationwide, homicides rose nearly 30% in 2020 from the year earlier, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation data. More cities are trying to address the problem by focusing on small groups of people responsible for outsize amounts of gun violence. In Oakland, Calif., criminologists found in a 2019 report that one half of 1% of the city's population was responsible for the majority of shootings.</p> <p>Advance Peace's fellowship program is now running or set to launch soon in nine cities, including Rochester, N.Y.; Fort Worth, Texas; and Sacramento, Calif. Another 18 cities are using elements of the program, according to Advance Peace and law-enforcement officials.</p> <p>Some law-enforcement officials and political leaders have opposed the program.</p>

Advance Peace Fresno's \$1.8 million budget comes from the city, state and nonprofit groups. Garry Bredefeld, a Republican city councilman, voted against funding the program because of the money provided to participants.

"I don't know why we would give people stipends to do the right thing," he said. "That is complete insanity and a misuse of taxpayer funds."

Advocates say the stipends are important to keep participants engaged in the program.

"I know a lot of people who got allowances growing up, I know a lot of people who got a little extra dough when they did well in school" said DeVone Boggan, chief executive of Advance Peace. "These guys haven't had a childhood."

Mr. Boggan founded the program more than a decade ago in the Bay Area city of Richmond, Calif., to address a growing murder rate. He hired former gang members and ex-cons to identify and mentor young men who had spent time behind bars for shootings, had been shot themselves or were suspected in recent shootings.

In the first five years of the program, 94% of the 68 fellows were alive, 79% hadn't been arrested or on gun-related charges, and 60% had received monetary incentives, according to an evaluation by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, a nonprofit research group.

Jason Corburn, a University of California, Berkeley professor who has evaluated the group's work in Sacramento and Stockton, Calif., said that over the course of an 18-month Advance Peace fellowship, less than \$20,000 is typically spent on a cohort of 30 to 50 individuals and an average of 20 to 50 shootings are prevented.

"If you were an economist, you'd say that's a great return on investment," he said.

Last year there were 732 shootings and 74 murders in Fresno, compared with 374 shootings and 45 murders in 2019. In June, city officials agreed to fund a local Advance Peace program for three years.

After Advance Peace launched in Fresno, it began identifying the most likely shooters with a list from police that included people with recent firearms arrests or those suspected in recent shootings, said its local program manager, Aaron Foster.

Over half of the murders in this city of 542,000 surrounded by farms are gang-related, said Lt. Andre Benson who heads the police department's gang unit. There are approximately 25,000 gang members or associates in Fresno, he said.

Mr. Foster, who used to be an active gang member and whose son and daughter were both shot to death, pored over the list with his employees, all of whom have been in gangs or grew up around them. They added some names and subtracted others; they now have 19 fellows aged 16 to 25.

Then came the hard part: getting gang members who get respect and money from their status as shooters to join the program.

Mr. Foster called 17-year-old Jaylin Johnson, whose nickname was "Lil Gunna" regularly, but couldn't get him to commit. In late December, Jaylin was shot and killed.

With Devrick, Mr. Foster believed the best approach was to send an employee named Roger Brown, nicknamed Syrup, to recruit him. Devrick is an aspiring rapper, and Syrup is a well-known hip-hop artist in Fresno.

Devrick's arrest for the shooting came as Syrup was trying to reel him in, a common occurrence, said Mr. Boggan. Fellows often don't stop shooting initially because it takes time for Advance Peace workers to become an influential force in their lives, he said.

Fresno police confirmed that Devrick was arrested earlier this year but declined to provide details on the status of his case because he was a minor.

To maintain credibility with the fellows, Advance Peace workers don't help with police investigations even when they know who is involved in shootings.

"Unfortunately, we've arrested several people that Advance Peace have tried to help," said Lt. Benson. "They understand that we have a job to do as well."

Devrick, whose nickname is "D Hill," said he first turned to gang life in ninth grade after his cousin was killed. He dropped out of school, leaving behind a promising high-school football career.

Since Devrick joined the program five months ago, Syrup has helped him find a place to live, re-enroll in school and join a job-training program. Last month, Syrup brought him into a studio to record a track called "Insecurities," which includes the lyrics, "You can't blame me for my sins because I'm a better man today."

Devrick said he no longer wants to be known as a shooter.

"When I was younger...I wanted to be called that," he said. "Now I'd rather be low-key."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 L.A. school safety officer charged w/murder
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/27/california-school-safety-officer-murder-charges
GIST	<p>California authorities have filed murder charges against a former school safety officer who fatally shot an unarmed 18-year-old girl, a rare prosecution for an on-duty killing by an officer.</p> <p>The Los Angeles district attorney announced Wednesday that Eddie Gonzalez, who had worked as a school officer in Long Beach, was facing one count of murder after he shot into a vehicle near a high school on 27 September, striking 18-year-old Manuela Rodriguez. The teenager, who went by Mona and had a five-month-old boy, was taken to a hospital and put on life support before she died a week later.</p> <p>Gonzalez had been patrolling the area near Millikan high school, south of LA, when he observed an altercation between Rodriguez and another teenage girl, according to the district attorney's office. Rodriguez then got into the rear passenger seat of a nearby car, and Gonzalez fired his handgun at the vehicle.</p> <p>Cellphone video footage that circulated on social media appeared to show the officer firing as the car was fleeing.</p> <p>"It's the beginning of justice for the family," said Luis Carrillo, an attorney for Rodriguez's family, to the Guardian. "But it doesn't erase the enormous pain that they live through every day. Nothing can make that pain go away."</p> <p>The Long Beach board of education terminated Gonzalez a week after the killing, saying the officer had violated policies of the school safety office. Its "use of force" policy says that officers "shall not fire at a fleeing person", "shall not fire at a moving vehicle" and "shall not fire through a vehicle window unless circumstances clearly warrant the use of a firearm as a final means of defense", the district said in a statement.</p> <p>Law enforcement agencies in the US have increasingly passed policies prohibiting shooting at moving vehicles, recognizing that firing into a car can endanger the public.</p>

“We must hold accountable the people we have placed in positions of trust to protect us,” said George Gascón, the LA district attorney, in a statement announcing the charges. “That is especially true for the armed personnel we traditionally have relied upon to guard our children on their way to and from and at school.”

Gascón, who was elected last year, campaigned on a promise to prosecute officers for excessive force and unjustified killings. In LA, officers are almost never [charged for killings](#).

After last month’s shooting, advocates questioned why the officer had been involved in an off-campus matter. A school district spokesman said at the time that its officers “work both on campus and near campuses [to] ensure safe passage of students to and from school”, and that the officer was on duty and was “conducting safe passage for students leaving Millikan high school”.

The district told the Guardian last month it employed nine full-time school safety officers and two part-time officers.

Advocates across the country have increasingly campaigned for armed police to be removed from schools, and to reinvest those funds in programs and services for students, such as counselors and social workers. Long Beach activists said they had called for officers to be [kicked out of local schools](#) prior to Rodriguez’s killing.

The city of Long Beach had also published a [racial equity report](#) last year that recommended the school district “reduce use of school police” and “review alternative models”.

Carrillo said he was grateful that the shooting was caught on cellphone camera and questioned whether charges would have been brought without it.

He said he hoped the tragic killing led to reforms: “When something like this happens that is so horrible, it does move the needle ... Armed officers around children should never be permitted.”

It’s unclear if Gonzalez has a lawyer, and he couldn’t be immediately reached. He was arrested Wednesday and charged with first-degree murder, [according to the LA Times](#). He is due to face an arraignment on Friday.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 Crisis: gangs rule much of Haiti
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/world/americas/haiti-gangs-fuel-shortage.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Gangs blocking Haiti’s ports, choking off fuel shipments. Hospitals on the verge of shutting down as generators run dry, risking the lives of hundreds of children. Cellphone towers going without power, leaving swaths of the country isolated. And an acute hunger crisis growing more severe each day.</p> <p>After a presidential assassination, an earthquake and a tropical storm, a new crisis is gripping Haiti: A severe fuel shortage is pushing the nation to the brink of collapse because gangs, not the government, rule about half of the nation’s capital.</p> <p>With gangs holding up fuel trucks at will, truck drivers have refused to go to work, setting off a nationwide strike by transportation workers and paralyzing a nation dependent on generators for much of its power.</p> <p>It is just the latest reflection of the security vacuum that has enveloped Haiti, where 16 Americans and one Canadian with an American missionary group were kidnapped this month by a gang demanding a \$17</p>

million ransom. The authorities know where the hostages are being held — but can't enter the gang-controlled neighborhood because the police are so outmatched.

In a stark demonstration of how common kidnappings are, a Haitian American pastor was recently abducted and released on Monday. Even worse, human rights activists say, the country's justice minister is accused of colluding with a gang to kidnap the pastor — an extreme example of the government's role in the country's violent decline.

"I hope for a better Haiti, but I know it won't get better," said Rousleau Desrosiers, watching his newborn breathe with the help of machines at a hospital whose generator is just days from running out of fuel. "Haiti only goes backward. The only gear we have is reverse."

In a news conference on Tuesday, Jimmy Cherizier, one of the country's most feared gang leaders, acknowledged that his criminal network was blocking the delivery of fuel. His intention, Mr. Cherizier said, was not to hurt ordinary people, but to put pressure on Haiti's political and business elite and push for the prime minister's resignation.

But the fuel shortage is already playing out in the cruelest ways among the most vulnerable Haitians.

A week ago, Mr. Desrosiers, the newborn's father, ran out of gas to operate his motorcycle taxi. Within days, he and his pregnant wife had run out of food. Then on Sunday, his wife delivered their son, a month early and in need of specialized care that the birth hospital did not offer.

Mr. Desrosiers shuttled his newborn to five hospitals before reaching one that took him in: St. Damien Pediatric Hospital, Haiti's main pediatric care facility.

"I'm worried," Mr. Desrosiers said of his son, whose tiny nostrils are filled with oxygen tubes that sustain his belabored breaths. A heat lamp warmed the child's palm-sized frame. "He isn't breathing properly."

The hospital's generators have only enough fuel to last until Friday. Without more, the machines sustaining the child's life will stop running and the entire hospital will have to shut down.

Doctors and nurses have run out of fuel for their cars and the few taxis that remain on the streets have become too expensive, so the hospital is using ambulances to bring staff members to work and buying mattresses so they can sleep on the floor. To save fuel, staff members are shutting off the lights as often as possible.

"It's chaos for Haiti," said Jacqueline Gautier, the hospital's chief executive.

During his news conference, the gang leader, Mr. Cherizier, said that "as a responsible leader and one who loves this country," he was going to allow gas to reach hospitals.

We "come from the people who are worse off and disfavored," he said in the tone of a statesman, hinting at his broader political ambitions in a country where suspected drug dealers fill the seats of Parliament. "We are looking to see how we can open a path so that the fuel could be delivered to hospitals."

Stoking class tensions, Mr. Cherizier called on Haitians to turn on the business and political elite, calling them "hoodlums."

In many countries, a fuel shortage would mean transportation is disrupted. In Haiti, where the electrical grid is unreliable, all the services and institutions that keep the country running — banks, hospitals, cell towers, businesses — get their power from generators, said Maarten Boute, the chief executive of Digicel Haiti, the country's largest mobile and broadband network provider.

Without fuel, "everything just shuts down," Mr. Boute said, adding that one in four Digicel cellular towers are out, without fuel to operate.

The government tried to lift the strike by offering money to transportation unions, but they refused. What they need, several union leaders said, is for officials to re-establish control over the slum neighborhoods surrounding the seaports in Port-au-Prince, the capital, where the gangs are most powerful, with access to guns, motorcycles — and fuel — the police don't have.

"We need police presence," said Marc André Deriphonse, who leads the National Association of Gas Station Owners and has recently met with the defense minister.

Mr. Deriphonse, who also runs a fuel transportation fleet, says he will not send his drivers back to the port until the government ensures 24-hour law enforcement along the route. "There's no authorities in those areas."

The fuel crisis is playing out across Haiti, with residents of far-flung towns surrounding vehicles as they drive through and insisting on siphoning off fuel from the tanks before letting them continue. In the north of the country, a crowd of villagers attacked a fuel truck and forced the driver to divert a portion of his haul into large drums.

The crisis has crippled everyone's ability to work and live. Gas stations have been boarded up for weeks. When owners show up at the stations, riots often break out among residents who are convinced the stations are hoarding fuel.

David Turnier, the president of Haiti's National Association of Petroleum Products Distributors, normally gets 35,000 gallons of gas, diesel and kerosene a week for the stations he owns in Port-au-Prince. He received 9,000 gallons for the entire month of October.

"Those guys are saying, 'That's it — we aren't going to risk our lives pulling the gas out,'" he said of the truck drivers. "People are running on fumes."

The streets of the capital emptied out this week, with public transportation grinding to a halt and most private taxis running out of fuel. Bank branches closed as tellers were unable to get to work. Hotels began shutting down or cutting air conditioning to save power. Major grocery stores closed in the capital, unable to keep meat fresh. On Tuesday, the head of Haiti's national ambulance center said the fuel shortage meant only 30 of the country's 90 ambulances were operating.

The government's withering authority is a consequence of its own shortsighted strategy to use gangs to achieve its objectives, human rights advocates say.

Early this month, Pastor Jean Ferrer Michel had parked outside of his church when armed, masked men jumped out of a justice ministry vehicle and bundled him away, his daughter, Farah Michel, said. He was later handed over to a gang and was released only on Monday evening after his family paid multiple ransoms.

Human rights organizations have accused Justice Minister Liszt Quitel of using both government resources and a Haitian gang to kidnap the pastor after a personal dispute.

"The car that kidnapped him came from the ministry of justice, and that is all I can say," said Ms. Michel, the pastor's daughter. "If the justice ministry has something to do with this, that is between them, God and their mothers."

Her family is under threat, she said, and planning to leave Haiti soon.

"You can't raise a kid in this atmosphere, you can't give birth, go to a job, raise a family," she said. "It's a real nightmare. You're not sleeping, but you're in a nightmare."

	<p>The justice minister, Mr. Quitel, did not respond to multiple requests for comment, but he denied the allegations to a local radio station.</p> <p>In the emergency room at St. Damien hospital, the mothers, cousins and grandmothers of patients are spending the night together on blue armchairs because there's no way to get home. Even there, they are going hungry, with the fuel shortage driving up the cost of food.</p> <p>Of Haiti's 11 million people, 4.4 million need food assistance, according to the United Nations.</p> <p>Sylvania Pierre, 53, watched over three malnourished grandchildren, and their mother, in the hospital.</p> <p>"The prices are going up like stairs," Ms. Pierre said, reaching over a hospital bed to straighten her one-year-old granddaughter's dress. "We don't have money to buy milk."</p> <p>Across the room, Mr. Desrosiers rested his hand over his newborn in a kind of embrace, trying to shush the child's crying and soothe the boy to sleep.</p> <p>"I would hope," Mr. Desrosiers said, gazing at his son, "that his future doesn't go the way my future is going."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	10/27 Officers charged: shooting man 60 times
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/us/jamarion-robinson-shooting-officers-charged.html
GIST	<p>Two Atlanta-area law enforcement officers were charged this week with felony murder for their roles in a confrontation in 2016 with an armed man who was shot nearly 60 times as they tried to arrest him, according to court documents.</p> <p>The officers — identified in an indictment as Eric A. Heinze, a deputy U.S. marshal, and Kristopher L. Hutchens, a Clayton County police officer — were members of a fugitive task force that had been serving an arrest warrant for the man, Jamarion Robinson.</p> <p>The task force members told the Georgia Bureau of Investigation that Mr. Robinson had fired a handgun at them two or three times on Aug. 5, 2016, after the officers broke through the door of his girlfriend's apartment in East Point, Ga., a Fulton County suburb of Atlanta.</p> <p>Mr. Robinson, 26, had been wanted on charges of attempted arson and aggravated assault of a police officer, according to the officers, who said that he still refused to drop his gun after being shot. Three task force members shot at Mr. Robinson, state investigators said.</p> <p>The family of Mr. Robinson has contested law enforcement accounts of what happened that afternoon. The fatal shooting of Mr. Robinson, who was Black and whose family said he had schizophrenia, touched off protests over racial injustice and excessive force, straining relations between local law enforcement authorities and their federal partners.</p> <p>Mr. Robinson's relatives said that his body had been riddled with 59 entry wounds and 17 exit wounds before it was dragged down a flight of stairs — in what relatives described as evidence tampering. The officers continued shooting Mr. Robinson after using a concussion grenade known as a flash-bang that had burned him, his mother, Monteria Robinson, said in an interview on Wednesday.</p> <p>"Someone stood over my son and shot down into his body," Ms. Robinson said. "They all say that my son fell to the ground, so why did they shoot another 80 or more volleys at my son?"</p> <p>A spokesman for the Fulton County District Attorney's Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday.</p>

The 21-page indictment, which was returned by a grand jury in Fulton County on Tuesday, did not elaborate on the nature of the charges against the two officers or their actions.

In addition to two counts each of felony murder, Mr. Heinze, 44, and Mr. Hutchens, 47, were charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, first-degree burglary, two counts of making false statements and two counts of violating the oath of a public officer.

Mr. Heinze and Mr. Hutchens did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Wednesday. It was not clear whether they had lawyers. Their status as law enforcement officers was also not clear.

The U.S. Marshals Service did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday, and a spokeswoman for the Clayton County Police Department did not immediately comment.

At the time of Mr. Robinson's death, he had been preparing to re-enroll at Tuskegee University in Alabama, where he had played football, his mother said. For more than five years, she said, she had been pressing prosecutors in Georgia to weigh charges against the officers involved in the fatal shooting.

"They just found a mother who fought back," Ms. Robinson said. "I wasn't taking their false narrative. The grand jury saw right through the lies as well."

Mr. Robinson's family credited Fani T. Willis, who last year became the [first Black woman to be elected as Fulton County's district attorney](#), for bringing the case to a grand jury.

Ms. Robinson said that she had hired a private investigator and enlisted the help of the noted forensic pathologist Dr. Michael Baden to seek justice for her son. She disputes the contention that he had opened fire on the officers.

"Do I believe that he shot at them?" she said. "No, I do not."

Ms. Robinson, 53, said that a third officer who was involved in her son's shooting had since died.

In 2018, [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#) reported that Paul Howard, the Fulton County district attorney at the time, was suing the Justice Department over its failure to disclose information about the shooting of Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Robinson's family has also filed a lawsuit in federal court against the Marshals Service and several task force members over the fatal shooting. The Atlanta branch of the N.A.A.C.P. has been supporting the family's efforts.

"When you look in that house and you see the carnage that was left, that was nothing more than an execution," Gerald A. Griggs, a lawyer for the N.A.A.C.P. in Atlanta and the first vice president of the organization's local branch, said in an interview on Wednesday.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	10/27 NY trooper charged w/murder: car ramming
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/nyregion/monica-goods-christopher-baldner.html
GIST	<p>Not long before midnight on Dec. 22, a New York state trooper stopped a car for speeding near Kingston, about an hour and a half north of Manhattan. Inside were Tristin Goods, his wife, April, and his daughters, Monica, 11, and Tristina, 12. They were heading north on the New York State Thruway, on their way to visit family for Christmas.</p> <p>In the exchange that followed, Mr. Goods and the trooper, Christopher Baldner, began to argue, and Mr. Goods, his lawyer said, asked to speak to a supervisor. Trooper Baldner responded by shooting pepper spray into the car, officials said.</p>

Fearing for his safety, his lawyer said, Mr. Goods drove off. Trooper Baldner chased him at a high speed. When he caught up to Mr. Goods, he rammed his car once and then, seconds later, rammed it again.

The impact knocked Mr. Goods's car over a guardrail into the highway's southbound lanes, his lawyer said. The vehicle flipped over several times before landing on its roof. Tossed from the car as it tumbled, Monica Goods died.

On Wednesday, Trooper Balder, 43, was charged with murder, manslaughter and reckless endangerment in an indictment announced by Letitia James, New York's attorney general.

"Police officers are entrusted to protect and serve," Ms. James said in a statement. "But Trooper Baldner allegedly violated that trust when he used his car as a deadly weapon and killed a young girl."

The Daily News reported the indictment earlier on Wednesday.

Trooper Baldner, a 19-year veteran of the State Police, turned himself in to the authorities early Wednesday. He was arraigned in Ulster County Court and ordered held in custody pending a bail hearing next week. He was suspended without pay upon surrendering, said William Duffy, a State Police spokesman.

"As with every state police investigation, our mission is to determine facts and ensure that justice is served, even when it involves one of our own members," Mr. Duffy said, adding that the State Police were continuing to work with Ms. James's office in investigating the matter. "Accountability is critically important to our agency."

The incident involving the Goodses was not the first such confrontation for Trooper Baldner, officials said. The indictment also charges him with endangering the lives of three people by ramming his vehicle into their car in a separate incident in the Kingston area in September 2019.

In yet another episode, which Gov. Kathy Hochul cited when she named Ms. James a special prosecutor in the case last week, Trooper Baldner struck a car in the same area in January 2017. The indictment did not include any charges related to that episode.

Trooper Baldner's lawyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment. He faces up to 25 years to life in prison if convicted on the murder count.

Thomas H. Mungeer, the president of the union that represents New York troopers, said in a statement that "we look forward to a review and public release of the facts, including the motorist's reckless actions that started this chain of events."

Reached by phone on Wednesday, Mr. Goods declined to comment on the charges against Trooper Baldner and referred questions to his lawyer, Joseph O'Connor.

Mr. O'Connor said that his client was "not celebrating today" but "was relieved" to learn of the indictment. Mr. O'Connor also said he expected data recorded by computers in his client's car and the trooper's vehicle to figure prominently in the prosecution.

Sanford Rubenstein, a lawyer for Monica Goods's mother, Michelle Surrency, said the charges were "the first step in the fight for justice" in the case.

[Return to Top](#)

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[Return to Top](#)